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THE CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN INDIA SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND CHALLENGES TODAY

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Kuncheria Pathil**

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The Catholic Churches in India Self-Understanding and Challenges Today

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Editorial

The Universal Church finds its concrete expression and realization in the multiplicity and diversity of the individual/local Churches. The birth of any Individual Church is the outcome of an incarnational process. The Gospel is received by the various peoples in the context of their particular socio-cultural, religious and political realities, and thus every Church becomes unique. The Early Churches in the New Testament were not an exception to this rule. The earliest Churches as seen in the New Testament were marked by rich diversity in their life-style, patterns of their worship, organizational structures, and in their approach to the Old Testament and theological methodology. Today the ecclesial diversity has become all the more complex in the historical process through the centuries, especially when more and more peoples, races, ethnic groups and tribes responded to the Gospel in their own way.

The Roman Catholic Church is a communion of twenty-two different Individual Churches, the largest of which is the western Roman/Latin Church. The other twenty-one Churches are smaller Churches, which are Eastern or Oriental. In India we have three different Catholic *Individual Churches*, historically, liturgically and administratively different, the Syro-Malabar Church, the Latin Church, and the Syro-Malankara Church. The present Number of *Jeevadhara* is an attempt to highlight the rich diversity of the Catholic Churches in India, their self-understanding and the challenges they face today.

The most ancient Church in India is the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas, planted by the Apostle St. Thomas in the southern most part of India known as Malabar in the early centuries. According to the tradition, the Apostle landed in the ancient port of Cranganore on the coast of Malabar along with the Arab traders, preached the Gospel to the natives and established several Christian communities that survived till today. Bosco Puthur, who is the Director of the Liturgical Research Centre of this Major Archiepiscopal Church, explores the identity of this Church in the midst of the present challenges and opportunities.

The Syro-Malabar Church has today a few mission dioceses in the central and north India. Everybody agrees that these missionary Churches should not be mere replicas of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala.

Mathew Kaniampampil who has been a very zealous, dynamic and creative missionary in central India for many years discusses the identity of these missionary Churches and the problems they face today.

The Roman or Latin Church was established in the various parts of India during the colonial period, and today it is the largest Church in India. S. Arulsamy, who had been the Secretary of Latin Bishops' Conference of India for many years, deals with the identity of this Church and its problems and challenges today.

The Latin Church in India has enormous scope and opportunities for legitimate diversity within itself. The Tribal Churches are typical examples. Amrit Tirkey, himself a tribal Christian priest, takes up the case of the Tribal Churches, especially of the Tribal Church of Chotanagpur.

The Malankara Catholic Church is yet another Catholic Individual Church in India. It is the outcome of a historical division in the 17th century among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala in the aftermath of it's conflict with the Portuguese ecclesiastical authorities. The dissident group received a Bishop from the Church of Antioch, which was not in communion with Rome, and they were called "Jacobites". A group of the Jacobites of Kerala became reunited with Rome in 1930, and they are called the *Malankara Catholic Church*. Philip Chempakasery, who belongs to this Church, introduces this Church and discusses the question of its identity and the present problems they face.

The present Number of *Jeevadhara* covers only the typical Catholic Churches in India. We have several other Churches here, such as, Syrian Orthodox, Jacobite and Mar Thoma, the Church of South India, the Church of North India and many others. We will have to take up the case of some of these Churches and discuss their self-understanding and identity and their present challenges, hopefully in a later Number of *Jeevadhara*. Diversity and division are not the same. Diversity is very enriching, where as divisions are sinful and scandalous, and they have to be healed and overcome. Today unfortunately, in many Indian Churches diversity and divisions coincide. Ecumenical Movement is a search for unity by healing divisions, while promoting legitimate diversity. We hope that this Number of *Jeevadhara* will inspire our readers to distinguish between diversity and division, to promote legitimate diversity and resolve to heal the present divisions among the different Christian Churches. The bonds that unite us are stronger than the barriers that divide us.

The Syro-Malabar Church: Its Self-Understanding and Challenges Today

Bosco Puthur

The Syro-Malabar Church is the most ancient of the three Churches in India. It is almost unanimously admitted today that its origin is traced to St. Thomas, One of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ. Rev. Dr. Bosco Puthur, who is the Director of the Liturgical Research Centre of the Major Archiepiscopal Church, explores the identity of the Church in all its aspects, its present challenges and the problems it faces today.

1. Brief History

The Syro-Malabar Church "has a noble place among all the Oriental Churches, because its origins are traced back to the most ancient Christian communities who received the light of the Gospel from Apostle Thomas", says Pope Pius XI¹.

The Church of St. Thomas Christians is an Apostolic Church founded in India by St. Thomas, one of the twelve Apostles of Christ. From early centuries the Church of St. Thomas Christians came into life-relation with the Christian communities, which came to be known as the East Syrian Church. This relationship made the St. Thomas Christians share the liturgical, spiritual and other ecclesiastical traditions with the East Syrian Church. At the same time St. Thomas Christians kept their distinctive character especially in Church administration and socio-cultural and ascetic-spiritual life.

The head of the St. Thomas Christian Church assumed the title 'the Metropolitan of All India'. A St. Thomas Christian priest with the title 'Archdeacon of All India' played the role of the effective leader of the

1. *Romani Pontifices*, AAS 7, 1924, p. 257

community (*Jathikukarthavyan*). The Archdeacon carried out the administration through general and local assemblies (*Pallyyogams*). Their socio-cultural life was fully Indian and in their life of worship they adopted certain elements of this life. Their ascetico-spiritual life reflected Indo-oriental tradition. The sum total of this life was called the 'Law of Thomas' (*Mar Thoma Margam*).

In the 16th century the St. Thomas Christians came into contact with the Portuguese. In the beginning the encounter was cordial but it developed into a confrontation because the missionaries in general failed to accept a Christian life different from theirs. Hence, they launched a policy of systematically making to conform the St. Thomas Christians to the western form of Christianity. They attempted to execute this policy through the decrees of the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor) in 1599. Subsequently, in 1600, the Church was brought under the Latin Padroado rule. The St. Thomas Christians were least prepared internally to accept these changes and their reaction erupted in a revolt (*Koonan Cross Oath*, 1653) against *Padroado* rule. This resulted in the division among the St. Thomas Christians. At this stage the Holy See intervened and introduced also its direct rule through the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, *Propaganda*. Although this was conceived as a provisional arrangement it lasted over two centuries. As the policy established by the western missionaries in the 16th century continued under the double regimes, *Padroado* and *Propaganda*, the St. Thomas Christians gradually intensified their resistance. This situation impeded also the attempts at reunion of all the St. Thomas Christians made by Mar Joseph Kariattil and Thomas Paremakal. Despite conflicts and tensions, the St. Thomas Christians also profited in theology, spirituality and discipline from their encounter with the western Church.

The struggle of the St. Thomas Christians for self-rule entered a definitive stage towards the end of the 19th century. By this time a part of the St. Thomas Christians were no more in communion with Rome. Those in communion with Rome found themselves divided under the Padroado and Propaganda rules. Their attempts to have a bishop who could celebrate according to their liturgy, made them to have recourse to the Chaldean Patriarch whose intervention resulted in further schism among the St. Thomas Christians. They, being deprived of their ancient Metropolitan See together with its all-India jurisdiction, continued the struggles for self-rule. In 1887 they were reorganized under two

vicariates, Kottayam and Trichur. In 1896, when the St. Thomas Christians obtained bishops of their own rite and nation, they were further reorganized into three vicariates, Thrichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry. In 1923, a hierarchy, on the Latin ecclesiastical polity was instituted for them. Ernakulam was raised to metropolitan status and Trichur, Changanacherry and Kottayam (1911) were made its suffragans. The name of the Church by usage in the official documents was changed to Syro-Malabar Church.

In 1956 the Syro-Malabar Church was found in a canonically anomalous situation of having two metropolitans and without a common head. From 1962 onwards mission eparchies were erected, which were not suffragans of any of these two. As the Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches was promulgated in 1990 it became imperative to rectify this anomaly. Thus in 1992, Pope John Paul II raised the Syro-Malabar Church to the status of Major Archiepiscopal *sui iuris* Church with the title of Ernakulam-Angamaly. Mar Antony Padiyara, the Metropolitan of Ernakulam was made its first Major Archbishop. The proper territory of the Major Archbishop was determined to be the two provinces of Ernakulam and Changanacherry². 1995 Trichur and Tellichery were also raised to the Metropolitan status. Today the Syro-Malabar Church has 4 Archdioceses, 22 Dioceses, 3282 diocesan priests, 2623 religious priests, 577 religious brothers, 29,039 religious sisters and 38,89,409 lay faithful. Cardinal Varkey Vithayathil is the present Major Archbishop of the Church.

2. Understanding the Identity

To know oneself is the greatest philosophy according to Socrates. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where do we go? What do we expect? What awaits us? These are some of the basic questions in any human's life as well as in the life of any meaningful institution. In the present article we try to express the self-understanding of the Syro-Malabar Church and its Challenges today. This is not an easy task, especially taking into consideration the present "crisis of identity and crisis of relevance", which the Church is going through.

2. This brief historical sketch is taken from the Preamble to the Code of Particular Law of the Syro-Malabar Church, *Synodal News*, No. 4, February 1995, p.119-121.

Regarding the present situation prevailing in the Syro-Malabar Church Mathew Vellanikal writes, "The Syro-Malabar Church faces at present a crisis of identity. Its members themselves are not in agreement regarding the elements that constitute the identity of their Church. This is a strange situation which is probably unique in the world"³. As bishop Chittilapilly expressed in his homily in 1996 to the members of the synod of bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church: "Our Church is going through an important phase in her history. The pangs of growth and vitality is felt everywhere. It has also shown tensions and anxieties and sometimes it is pictured as a very difficult and critical situation...It is not only an embarrassing but also a frightening situation"⁴.

Archbishop Powathil says, "The question of identity is of vital importance (for the Syro-Malabar Church) since it has far-reaching implications and consequences for the life and activities of the Church ... The present ecclesial status of the Syro-Malabar Church is one of search for the discovery or re-discovery of the ecclesial identity. None would call into question the necessity of an identity and a distinctiveness of the Syro-Malabar Church, though this is perceived in different degrees of awareness and understanding. Most of the differences of opinion in our Church in general or in the episcopate in particular, are traceable to an uncertainty as to what constitutes an ecclesial identity and a particular ecclesial tradition significant for the great Tradition."⁵

3. Confusion of Names

"Even the name Syro-Malabar or Indo-Chaldean, all admit, does not suit our Church. Ours is the Church of St. Thomas tracing its origin to the apostle and the early disciples. It is for the lack of a suitable name that we stick to the present ones"⁶. Father Placid Podipara C. M. I. says; "The Church which today is generally known as *Syro-Malabar* is not

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3. Mathew Vellanikal, "Perspectives on the Identity of St. Thomas Christians", *Mission In India Today: The Task of St. Thomas Christians*, Kuncheria Pathil C.M.I. (Ed), Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 1988, p. 82
 4. Mar Paul Chittilapilly, "Homily", *Acts of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church held in the Vatican from 8 to 16 January 1996*, Fr. Jose Porunnedom (Ed), The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Kochi, 1996, p.10.
 5. Mar Joseph Powathil. "Identity And Dignity of the Syro-Malabar Church". *Ibid.*, pp.61, 62.
 6. Powathil, "Missionary Role of the Syro-Malabar Church", Pathil (ed) op.cit. p.8

distinct from the most ancient *Indian Church of the Christians of St. Thomas*."⁷

Since it followed the Chaldean or the East Syrian liturgy, the Syro-Malabar Church was called *Indo-Chaldean* or *Chaldeo-Indian*; but it was afterwards called *Chaledao-Malabar*. The designation *Syro-Malabar* came into ecclesiastical use after the middle of the 19th century⁸. They have been called "Syro-Malabrians" by the Propaganda Congregation⁹. The liturgical books such as the Missal and the Divine Office published in Malabar with ecclesiastical approbation even in 1952 use, the title "Chaldean", "Syro-Chaldean", of "Malabar". The names "Chaldean", "Chalodiac", "Syro-Chaldean", "Syro-Chalodiac", "Syro-Oriental", "Oriental Syrian", "and East Syrian" have all the same significance; "Syrian" is used generically for all these"¹⁰. "The Syro-Malabarians in recent times have been referred to as *Malabarians*, *Syrians of Malabar*, *Malabar Syrians*, and *Romo-Syrians*."¹¹

For a considerable period of time there prevails an opinion that the present name, "Syro-Malabar", is no more suitable for the Church and hence a more suitable name has been contemplated. With this in mind there took place some discussion in the synod of bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church in 1993 and 1994. Thus the synod came to a decision "to adopt the name 'the Church of St. Thomas Christians' subject to the approval of the Holy See"¹² However, taking into consideration the implications of such a change the decision was reconsidered and it was decided to discuss the matter in the eparchial level¹³.

Inviting proposals from the readers the *Synodal News* also published a guideline. The following are the relevant points of the guidelines. The Church founded by Apostle Thomas in India was during the course of centuries known by various names such as The Thomas Christians, Nazrani Christians, Mar Thoma Nazrani Christians, St. Thomas Christians of India, meaning the Church of Thomas Christians.

7. Placid J. Podipara CMI, *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Prakasam Publications, Alleppey, 1976, p. 15

8. Ibidem. 9. Idem, p. 21, note 2.

10. Ibidem. 11. Idem, p. 16

12. *Synodal News*, No. 2, February 1994, p. 31.

13. *Synodal News*, No. 4, February 1995, p. 117.

Since they were using the Aramaic or Syriac language in the liturgy they were also called Syrian Christians as opposed to Latin Christians. St. Thomas Christians were also called the Chaldean Catholics or Chaldean Church of India. The territory of the St. Thomas Christians, which was an All India Church, was restricted to the Malabar area and eventually this gave rise to the term Syro-Malabar.

"The name Syro-Malabar is disadvantageous, for (1) It gives the impression that the Church of Thomas Christians was always confined to Malabar; (2) Presently Malabar refers only to Northern Districts of Kerala; (3) In North Indian Missions the name suggests that the so-called Syro-Malabar Church has no relevance outside Malabar and so it is hindrance for evangelisation"¹⁴. The same guideline proposed that the name of the Church should imply three ideas: a) That the Church is of Apostolic origin traced to St. Thomas; 2) that it is not and was not confined to Malabar or Kerala; 3) that it has universal dimension.

The synod of bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church held from 5th to 17th November 2001 again discussed the matter and decided to study it further at various levels.

4. What is Identity?

"Identity is individuality or personality. It is the distinctive character and appearance belonging to an individual or a class, by which it is being known. An individual or class is distinctive only when it is identifiable in its specific characteristics; inversely nothing is distinctive which lacks its original and specific characteristics. Identity is that which is undivided in itself, but divided from others. As in the case of a human person the identity of a Church is not an easily definable reality and we cannot fully exhaust it either. In general, we can say that it is the manifestation of what the Church actually is. The identity is something, which is being expressed by a particular form of living. By identity we mean that which constitutes something unique. There is organic continuity and growth. Hence it is never dead or stagnant but a living, dynamic and organic reality"¹⁵

The ecclesial identity is rooted in the tradition, which has come from the apostles through the Fathers of the Church (OE, 1). 'Tradition' is the

14. Ibid., P. 118.

15. Powathil, "Identity and Dignity of the Syro-Malabar Church", Op. Cit., p. 63.

apostolic Christ-experience incarnated in a people, taking a specific form of life, spiritual heritage, integrated into the socio-cultural milieu of that people. Hence the Church can be practically identified as the "Tradition"¹⁶.

In order to bear in mind the correct Catholic understanding of Tradition, let me quote Pope John Paul II: "*Tradition is the heritage of Christ's Church*. This is a living memory of the Risen one met and witnessed to by the Apostles who passed on his living memory to their successors in an uninterrupted line, guaranteed by the apostolic succession through the laying of hands, down to the bishops of today. This is articulated in the historical and cultural patrimony of each Church, shaped by the witness of the martyrs, fathers and saints, as well as by the living faith of all Christians down the centuries to our own day. It is not an unchanging repetition of formulas, but a heritage which preserves its original, living kerygmatic core. It is Tradition that preserves the Church from the danger of gathering only changing opinions, and guarantees her certitude and continuity."

"When the uses and customs belonging to each Church are considered as absolutely unchangeable, there is a sure risk of tradition losing that feature of a living reality which grows and develops, and which the Spirit guarantees precisely because it has something to say to the people of every age. As Scripture is increasingly understood by those who read it, every other element of the Church's living heritage is increasingly understood by believers and is enriched by new contributions, *in fidelity and in continuity*. Only a religious assimilation, in the obedience of faith, of what the Church calls "Tradition" will enable Tradition to be embodied in different cultural and historical situations and conditions. Tradition is never pure nostalgia for things and forms of past, nor regret for lost privileges, but the living memory of the Bride, kept eternally youthful by the Love that dwells within her" (*Orientale Lumen*, 8).

The core of the Church is the apostolic Christ experience. This apostolic Christ experience - faith - is received into the socio-cultural milieu of a people, giving rise to a certain way of life expressed in their liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline. Hence liturgy, spirituality, theology and Church discipline are decisive elements for the identity of a Church.

16. Cf. Ibidem.

Basic characteristic features of the Syro-Malabar Church can be expressed in following four dimensions: Apostolic, Catholic, Oriental and Syro-Malabar. The identity of a Church is a complex reality which includes the apostolic heritage of all the Churches of the Catholic Communion, the patrimony common to all the Oriental Churches, the liturgical, spiritual, theological and disciplinary patrimony of the tradition to which that Church belongs, and to specific elements which it has developed in the concrete socio-cultural and historical milieu¹⁷.

a) Apostolic: Syro-Malabar Church is an apostolic Church, founded by St. Thomas the Apostle of Jesus Christ. This is the unanimous, unbroken and living tradition, which is accepted by all the members of the Syro-Malabar Church. "One important aspect of the identity of the St. Thomas Christians was and continues to be their consciousness of their apostolic origin"¹⁸. Even though we lack sure historical documents regarding the first centuries, we can learn a good deal from later evidences. The St. Thomas Christians have a deep attachment to their Apostle. Thomas is even today a widely used Christian name among them. They consider the tomb of the Apostle at Mylapore as their most important pilgrim center and the seven Christian communities the Apostle established as the cradle of Christianity in India.

"For the St. Thomas Christians, Christianity was not a set of doctrines, concepts or dogmas, but a way of life (*margam*) to obtain salvation and to reach God the Father, which was introduced into India by the Apostle Thomas (*Thoma margam*). The way or law of Thomas contained the faith, liturgy, spiritual life, discipline, traditions and customs, or in other words the whole ecclesial, socio-political and cultural *modus vivendi et agendi* of the St. Thomas Christians. They considered the law or way of Thomas, which they received directly from the Apostle, sacrosanct and inviolable and were even ready to shed their blood in its defense"¹⁹.

According to George Nedungatt the expression "Law of Thomas" is a patronymic attribution, without the claim to guarantee that all that is included in it derives directly and historically from Thomas. It is rather

17. Cf. Ibid, P.64.

18. A. Mathias Mundadan C.M.I., *Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggles for Autonomy*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore. 2003, p.2.

19. Jacob Kollaparambil, *The St. Thomas Christians Revolution*, Kottayam, 1081, 63.

like the global attribution of the Pentateuch to Moses or of the psalms to David. And just like the "Torah" in Hebrew and "Nomos" in Greek, "Law" is used in this expression "Law of Thomas" with a range of connotation for exceeding the restricted juridical sphere. The modern equivalent would be "rite", which covers the ensemble of the patrimony - liturgical, theological, spiritual and canonical - of a particular Church²⁰.

"It is reasonable to believe that St. Thomas must have organized the Church he founded in India along the lines adopted by the other Apostles respecting the local language and customs,"²¹ says Varkey Vithayathil, who later became Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. "We can reasonably think that the apostle gave his converts a way of worship suited to their culture in their own native language and that he did not impose any Jewish customs on them. In this he was moved by the deliberations of the Council of Jerusalem described in the *Acts of the Apostles*."²²

"If the apostolate of St. Thomas is accepted, its natural consequence and logical conclusion, namely, that the apostle must have left behind some form of 'breaking of the bread' and the celebration of other 'sacraments' also is to be accepted."²³ "St. Thomas Christians were deeply conscious of their apostolic tradition. They had no doubt that they belonged to a Church of apostolic origin and they were in a spiritual and real way linked with their faith in faith and his apostolate."²⁴ I believe that there is complete agreement in our church regarding the apostolic origin of our Church.

b) Catholic: All the Churches in the Catholic communion have a common patrimony - the same faith, the same sacraments and the same hierarchical government, which express the unity of the Church, the body of Christ.

"It may not be denied that owing to their estrangement from the rest of Christendom, and owing to their life in the midst of non-Christians,

20. Cf. George Nedungatt S.J., *Spirituality of the Syro-Malabar Church*, STAR Publication, Alwaye, 1989, P. 19.

21. Varkey Vithayathil CSSR, "St. Thomas Christians and the Struggle for an Authentically Indian Church", Pathil, Op. Cit., P. 57.

22. Varkey Vithayathil, "Mission and Life of St. Thomas in India", George Menachery (Ed), *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Vol. II, p. 4.

23. Mar Jacob Thoomkuzhy, "Liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church: Problems and Prospects", Fr. Jose Porunnedom, Op. Cit., p. 90.

24. Powathil, Op.Cit., p.64.

certain superstitious practices and errors had crept in among the Thomas Christians."²⁵ There were among them books containing 'Nestorian' or Theodorian formulas and expressions. These were very subtle and were often seen side by side with passages of orthodox or apparently orthodox nature. The St. Thomas Christians were entirely out of sphere of controversial and sectarian surroundings connected with these formulas and expressions²⁶. They had their ancient faith, which was little influenced by, and was far away from, the theological and sectarian controversies. There were no theologians or controversialists among them. Fr. Placid Podipara CMI says that "the books were written in (East) Syriac and never translated into the ordinary language of the place; The Thomas Christians, of course, loved Syriac, but, as a whole, were not very proficient in it."²⁷

In the 16th century we see that the St. Thomas Christians spontaneously "treated the Portuguese as brothers in faith fully entering into *communication* with them *in sacris*, not considering themselves as a Church separate and independent from Rome. The Portuguese too communicated with the Thomas Christians *in sacris*."²⁸ In general the Portuguese were not favourable to anything different from theirs. "Everything that was not Latin was heretical or schismatic or superstitious for many of the Portuguese".²⁹

St. Thomas Christians, prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, had been living their life according to the 'Law of Thomas', which is a combination of two elements, i.e., the geographical, political, and socio-cultural environment of India and the ecclesiastical world of the East-Syrian Church, whose prelates were shepherding them, whose theological outlooks and liturgical form they shared. According to Fr. A. Mathias Mundadan "it is this life in two worlds, which gave those Christians their pre-16th century identity. It is this identity the Christians characterized as the 'Law of Thomas', distinct from the 'laws' or customs established by St. Peter and other Apostles. It is this identity which came into conflict with the identity of the Christians from the West, a conflict which gave rise to various moments of tension and exploded in

25. Placid J. Podipara C.M.I., *The Thomas Christians*, St. Paul's Publications, Bombay, 1970, 102.

26. Ibid., p.103.

27. Ibid., P. 103-104.

28. Ibid., p. 109.

29. Ibidem

the form of a rebellion in the middle of the 17th century, and shattered the unity of the ancient Indian Church."³⁰

Although one may still find at random people who put into question the history of the catholicity of the St. Thomas Christians³¹, not only scholars but also above all Popes have confirmed the orthodoxy of faith of St. Thomas Christians. In 1952 Pope Pius XII expressed his satisfaction that "the Christian community formed by the Apostle conserved intact the legacy he left them." In 1980 Pope John Paul II declared, "It has never been severed from the communion with the Church of Rome."³²

c) Oriental: The Oriental Churches have certain common ontological features and basic orientations in liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline. Alexandrian, Antiochean, Armenian, Cahldean and Constantinopolitan are the five great Oriental traditions³³. Each of these traditions has its own specific nature and characteristic features in liturgy, spirituality, theology and discipline. The Syro-Malabar Church shares the oriental characteristic features through the East Syrian tradition.

"In general today, the bishops and the people of the Syro-Malabar Church agree that our Church is an individual or sui iuris Church and that it has shared the East Syrian liturgy. However, regarding the history and implications of it all are not in agreement."³⁴ As to the implications of this sharing there is difference of opinion in the Church.

There is an opinion that St. Thomas Christians had an Apostolic-Indian identity in the first four or five centuries. They say that lack of documentary evidence is no reason to reject this opinion. And only later it was influenced by the East- Syrian liturgy through historical vicissitudes. And at a still later stage it was also influenced by the Latin liturgy. According to this group "the identity and sources of the Syro-Malabar liturgy are not to be sought after in the East Syrian tradition alone, but also in other influences and traditions."³⁵

30. A. Mathias Mundadan C.M.I., Op.Cit., P.25.

31. Dr. K.J. John, *The Road to Daimper*, Kerala Latin Catholic History Association, Cochin, 1999.

32. X. Koodapuzha, *Faith and Communion of the Indian Church of the Saint Thomas Christians*, Kottayam, 1982, P.153.

33. CCEO, c.28 #2.

34. Powathil, Op.Cit., P.66.

35. Thoomkuzhy, Op. Cit., P. 93

But there are others who hold that "as far as documentary evidences exist and in accordance with the process of the formation of ecclesial traditions according to the official teaching of the Church (LG, No.23), the Syro-Malabar Church is a *sui iuris* Church belonging to the East Syrian Ecclesial tradition (CCEO, c. 28 #2). The latinization which took place after the 16th century was not received by the Syro-Malabarians, but imposed from outside."³⁶ According to this group the liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church is identical with that of the East Syrian Church and hence its sources are to be sought in that East Syrian tradition.

d) Individual Ecclesial Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church: The Catholic Church is a communion of different *sui iuris* Churches. The Latin *sui iuris* Church, which is the only Western Church, comprises the main bulk of the faithful of the Catholic Church. There are at present 21 Eastern *sui iuris* Churches. The Syro-Malabar Church is the second largest of all the Eastern Catholic Churches.

What is an autonomous or *sui iuris* Church? "Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches is very clear and precise about it: "A community of the Christian faithful, which is joined together by a hierarchy according to the norm of law and which is expressly or tacitly recognized as *sui iuris* by the supreme authority of the Church, is called in this Code a Church *sui iuris*." (CCEO, c.27)³⁷

According to this canon, the essential features of a *sui iuris* Church are: 1) A community of Christian faithful, 2) Joined together by a hierarchy according to the norms of the law, 3) Recognized as *sui iuris* by the supreme authority of the Church.

Making a clear distinction between Church and Rite, CCEO defines the latter. "A rite is a liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage, differentiated by the culture and the circumstances of the history of peoples, which is expressed by each Church *sui iuris* in its own manner of living the faith." (c. 28 #1)³⁸

36. Ibidem.

37. Cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Latin - English Edition, New English Translation, Prepared under the auspices of the Canon Law Society of America, Canon Law Society of America, Washington, 2001.

38. "Ritus est patrimonium liturgicum, theologicum, spirituale et disciplinare cultura ac rerum adiunctis historiae populorum distinctum, quod modo fidei vivendae uniuscuiusque Ecclesiae *sui iuris* proprio exprimitur"

According to this canon, the essential characteristics of a rite are: 1) Heritage (patrimony), which consists of a) Liturgy, b) Theology, c) Spirituality and d) Discipline. 2) Differentiated by a) culture b) circumstance of the history of peoples. "In applying the word 'patrimony' (heritage) to the Syro-Malabar Church, it is to be understood in a wider sense. It is not merely what is inherited from the Apostle Thomas (apostolic patrimony); nor is it Chaldean traditions alone. It either includes or it complimented with the heritages the Syro-Malabar Church acquired and handed down from the Indian customs, Chaldean rite, Latin rite, etc."³⁹

5. Liturgical Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church

Church manifests herself in liturgy. Liturgy is the celebration of the faith of the Church. Pope John Paul II states in his recent Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*: "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*"⁴⁰.

Liturgical identity is an area where there are differences of opinion in Syro-Malabar. The liturgical principles of the Second Vatican Council: restoration, adaptation and inculturation are interpreted by different groups to suit their own differing points of view.

One position is that the Syro-Malabar liturgy is of East Syrian tradition, which is one of the most ancient and rich oriental liturgical traditions. The Syro-Malabar Qurbana text is a precious gold mine. It is a very rich text of the Trinitarian, Christological and pneumatological themes. Hence, a person attending Syro-Malabar liturgical celebration should concretely encounter the liturgical distinctiveness of this apostolic

39. Dr. Andrews Thazhath, *The Quest For Identity: The Syro-Malabar Church and its Rite*, T.I.T., Thrissur, 1992, P. 2-3. Basing himself on the previous English translation (which is incorrect) of CCEO ("A rite is the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each Church sui iuris" c. 28 #1). Mar Joseph Powathil says: "Those who hold that organic growth could result in the creation of a new rite interpret the above mentioned Canon in such a way that the liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony of a Church is made distinct by culture and by the circumstances of the history of the peoples so that culture and historical vicissitudes become decisive for the distinctive patrimony. This is a very dangerous conclusion." (Powathil: Op. Cit.,, P. 76).

40. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*. No.1.

Church⁴¹. Hence what is primarily needed is the restoration of the East-Syrian liturgical texts in its entirety and purity.

But there is another position "that the Church inherited a proper, developed liturgical celebration from the Apostle Thomas. According to this position, it was fully Indian in nature and totally distinct from the liturgy of the Church of the East. This apostolic Indian liturgy is distinct from the liturgy of the Church of the East. This apostolic Indian liturgy is said to have been practiced until the arrival of the East Syrian settlers and missionaries. This view holds that both East Syrian and Latin forms of worship are 'foreign' to St. Thomas Christians of India."⁴² So if at all one has to go to the pristine liturgy, it should be to the apostolic Indian liturgy. Or else we have to take into consideration the present life situation of the people and adapt the liturgy accordingly. Hence this group holds the view that along with restoration there should go hand in hand adaptation, renewal and inculturation. Archbishop Jacob Thoomkuzhy is of opinion that "While looking for the identity of the Syro-Malabar liturgy and its original sources, I think, one has to take into consideration the two thousand years of history it has passed through and the various influences it has undergone during this long period of its existence. Its identity is that it draws its inspiration from various traditions. Therefore its sources also are found in different traditions"⁴³.

This is an area where there is still need of a genuine Christian dialogue at all levels in order to reach an ecclesial consensus. As Robert Taft remarks that what is needed is "the dialectic of 'nova et vetera', tradition and renewal."⁴⁴ And he gives a guideline for this dialogue: "The past is instructive, not normative. History does not teach us what we should do today, and we study the past not to imitate it, but simply to understand. What the Church adheres to is not history but tradition, and tradition is not the past but the Church's self-consciousness now of the present living reality that has been handed on to it out of its past. In judging what is tradition the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, looks not into the past but within, to itself"⁴⁵. He further proposes certain concrete principles: They are 1) Recovery of the tradition where it has eroded.

41. Cf. Powathil, *Op. Cit.*, P.67

42. *Ibidem.*

43. Thoomkuzhy, *Op.Cit.*, P.93

44. "Intervention by Rev. Dr. Robert F. Taft S.J.", *Porunnedom, Op. Cit.*, P.126

45. *Ibid.* P. 129.

2) Renewal where needed. 3) Fidelity to the substantial unity of the Rite. 4) Seriousness of purpose and preparation. 5) Ecumenism. 6) Inculturation. 7) Implementation and ongoing formation. 8) Pastoral realism. 9) Concentration on the essentials⁴⁶.

Let me quote the recent exhortation of Pope John Paul II to the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church: "The liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church, for centuries a part of India's rich and varied culture, is the most vivid expression of your people's identity. The celebration of the Eucharistic Mystery in the Syro-Malabar Rite has played a vital part in moulding the experience of faith in India (cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 27)... I exhort you to guard and renew this treasure with great care, never allowing it to be used as a source of division...As the primary custodians of the liturgy, you are called at all times to be vigilant to protect against unwarranted experimentation by individual priests, which violate the integrity of the liturgy itself and can also cause great harm to the faithful (cf. EA, no.10)."

"I encourage you in your efforts to renew your "ritual patrimony" in the light of the Council documents, with particular attention given to *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and in the context of the *Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches* and my own Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen*."⁴⁷

It seems that it is along the same line that the theological, spiritual and disciplinary identity of the Syro-Malabar Church has to be rediscovered.

6. Concerns and Challenges

a) Communion in the Church: The most important concern and challenge, which the Syro-Malabar Church has to face, is the internal unity and communion in the Church at all levels. Sr. Mary Benitia CHF expresses this concern in the following words: "As a representative of the Syro-Malabar religious women, I would like to express our sentiments before this Synod. For us, religious women, Liturgy is the center of our religious life. We strive very much, to deepen our love towards the Eucharistic Lord. The present controversy has created much disunity among our faithful and it creates confusion in spiritual life and our

46. Cf. Ibid., Pp. 130-131.

47. . *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition, No. 20, 14 May 2003. P. 3.

apostolic field. We experience much pain in our hearts. It is our prayer to Our Lord, and humble request to our ecclesiastical authorities that this situation may be settled soon, peacefully."⁴⁸ This was expressed in the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church held in the Vatican in 1996. Since then, in spite of some disturbing experiences, the Church has grown into a mature attitude of consensus. The Liturgical Research Centre of the Syro-Malabar Church erected in 1999 is now playing a modest role in bringing about understanding and consensus especially in the field of liturgy. Let us hope that genuine spirit of dialogue at all levels will lead to a long-standing spirit of communion in the Church.

b) Pastoral care of the Syro-Malabarians in India and Abroad: The issue of the pastoral care of Oriental Catholics in India and abroad continues to be of concern of the Syro-Malabar Church. Both the hierarchy as well as the faithful has been repeatedly asking for the implementation of the directives of the magisterium in the case of the Syro-Malabarians. The only significant development in this regard is the erection of the eparchies of Kalyan and Chicago and a few parishes in Bangalore and Delhi for the Syro-Malabar faithful. The Syro-Malabar faithful in many other cities of India and in the Gulf countries are not given adequate pastoral care.

Unfortunately, in the present circumstances the Syro-Malabar Church is not in position to look after the pastoral needs of its migrant sons and daughters, because she has no jurisdiction in the areas where these migrants live. At the same time it is the right and duty of the Church to take care of them. The Church has to ensure that the faithful are provided with the means to grow up in their own ecclesial traditions everywhere in the world. Likewise it is the right and duty of the faithful of each *sui iuris* Church to have worship according to the norms of their own Church.

It is needless to say that there is urgency in taking adequate measures for the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar migrants both in India and abroad. It is urgent because the slower the pace of action the more the time required to bring them back to the consciousness of the identity as belonging to an Oriental Church, if not to faith. The first generation migrants who are uprooted from their cultural and geographical background are totally estranged in the local situation. They often

48. "Intervention of Sr. Mary Benitia C.H.F.", Porunnedom, Op.Cit., P.145

become anonymous in the large majority of the people of other religions and of other Christian Churches. That may lead them even to the loss of faith and some may join other Churches or even Pentecostal sects⁴⁹. That is why expressing the sentiments of the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church, Cardinal Antony Padiyara had appealed: "Pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar migrants within and outside India has been a growing concern of this Church. But unless due co-operation is had from all including the Roman dicasteries by imbibing the spirit behind these proclamations the Syro-Malabar hierarchy is in a helpless situation. I appeal to His Holiness to take immediate steps for the implementation of the Council directives in this regard."⁵⁰

c) Possibilities of Evangelization: "The Syro-Malabar Church has unique position among all the Eastern Churches as an evangelizing Church. It extends itself into hitherto untouched areas within India and sends many missionaries to other countries as well."⁵¹ The erection of the mission eparchies of the Syro-Malabar Church has certainly enhanced in a big way the missionary dynamism among its members. The mission eparchies of the Syro-Malabar Church are doing excellent work in many parts of India.

But these eparchies are erected as suffragans of the Latin Metropolitans. This means that they are not canonically related to the Mother Church, though they are called eparchies of the extended territory. Time and again requests have been made to the Holy See to include the territories of these eparchies in the proper territory of the Syro-Malabar Church. If that is not possible immediately, the request is to raise one or two eparchies in the mission areas to the status of Metropolitan Sees and to bring others under them. Syro-Malabar Church has still a lot of potentialities, which can be made use of in the field of Evangelization. Let us hope that Syro-Malabar Church will be given enough opportunities to make use of these potentialities for evangelization in different parts of India.

49. Cf. Mar Gregory Karotemprel, "Pastoral Care of the Syro-Malabar Migrants in India and Abroad", Porunnedom, Op. Cit., p. 176

50. Cardinal Antony Padiyara, *Welcome Speech*, Porunnedom, Op. Cit., P. 28

51. Mar Gratian Mundadan, "Missionary Enterprise of the Syro-Malabar Church", Porunnedom, Op. Cit., P.199.

d) Ecumenism: The Syro-Malabar Church has a greater obligation to work for the unity especially with its sister Churches of the St. Thomas tradition. As we have seen in the historical sketch the unity of the Church had been broken at different stages of history due to different historical vicissitudes. One of the most important elements in the search for unity of the Churches of St. Thomas tradition is rediscovery of the authentic identity of the Church in its liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline, taking into consideration the culture and historical circumstances of the people.

e) To be a Witness of Love in India amidst a growing culture of hatred and violence: India is witnessing a growing tendency of hatred and violence due to religions, caste and political exploitations. In these circumstances we are called to be witnesses of love of Jesus Christ. "Authentic evangelization is sensitive to local culture and custom...Therefore, in your relations with your brothers and sisters of other religions, I encourage you to 'strive to discern and welcome whatever is good and holy in one another, so that together you can acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral truths which alone guarantee the world's future' (cf. Address to Religious Leaders in India, 7 November 1999, 3)" says John Paul II⁵².

Years back as a scholar our present Major Archbishop had made a passionate appeal for dialogue with Indian culture. "It is our firm conviction that in the designs of Providence, the rich cultural heritage of India has much to contribute to the inheritance of Christ like the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Hence the disciples of St. Thomas representing the oldest Christianity in this country should continue this dialogue with India by striving for an ever deeper incarnation in the languages, customs, literature, art, music and philosophy that belong to Indian culture which is undoubtedly one of the major cultures that the world has developed. Then their Church will not be looked upon as foreign or antinational or a threat to the culture of the country and the Gospel they preach will be more easily accepted by her people."⁵³

52. *L'osservatore Romano*, No. 20 - 14 May 2003, P. 3

53. Varkey Vithayathil, "St. Thomas Christians and the Struggle for an Authentically Indian Church", Pathil, Op. Cit., P. 79.

Conclusion

I consider that there is no better conclusion to these reflections than the concluding words of Robert Taft on the Syro-Malabar Church in his address to the members of the Syond of Bishops held in Rome: " You are one of the Catholic Church's great success stories! There is not another Church on the face of the earth, east, west, north or south, Catholic or Orthodox, that is such a shining beacon of faith and devotion. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is a model of religious practices, a dynamo of apostolic zeal, such a prolific cradle of priestly and religious vocations that you do not even know what to do with them all!! Tears come to my eyes when I think of the marvels of faith I have personally experienced in the crowded parish churches, convents, and seminary chapels of Kerala, especially the seminaries with their hundreds upon hundreds of seminarians"

"So let us thank God, put divisions aside, and get back to working together to build the Kingdom of God, a kingdom in which there are neither majorities nor minorities but only sisters and brothers in Christ"⁵⁴.

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54. Op. Cit., pp.136-137

The Mission of the Syro-Malabar Church in Central and North India: A Call for a New Identity

Mathew Kaniamparampil

The Mission of the Syro-Malabar Church in the Central and North India is worth discussing and is ably done by a veteran and dynamic missionary of that Church, Rev.Fr.Mathew Kaniamparampil,CMI who has been working in Central India for many years. With all its talents and resources,yet this Church was confined to Kerala till the second half of the 20th Century. It was only in 1962 that this Church could enter into the heartland of India with a new vision, a new mandate and a new dynamism.The author calls for a new identity and responsibility and invites the members to enter the field with renewed courage and enthusiasm.

Introduction

An analysis of the work of evangelization of the Syro-Malabar Church in the areas of central and north India will be relevant, illuminating and challenging in the present circumstances. The Syro-Malabar Church is one of the most ancient individual Churches among the global communion of diverse ecclesial traditions. It has its apostolic origin from the Apostle St. Thomas himself. Despite its early origin in this country, and despite its long history of 19 centuries of existence, this hoary apostolic heritage and rich ecclesial tradition remained confined to this narrow strip of land called Kerala, the southernmost State of India, without opening itself up for evangelizing the vast stretch of the country that lay before it.

What were the factors that prevented it from gaining access to the rest of the country? Was there any governmental opposition or persecution? What was the attitude of the Church of North India? Was not the Syro-Malabar Church welcome to the North to make the best use of their rich resources and personnel? What would be the new attitude

of the North Indian Church today in this matter? Is it impossible to have a greater and practical inter-ritual collaboration among all the ecclesial traditions in view of a more enthusiastic work of evangelization in north India today? Is it not the present situation of growing religious intolerance and fundamentalism challenging all the Churches in India to have a concerted effort to make Jesus and his salvific message known to millions in this land? Are not the gospel values most relevant for the Indian scenario today? Is it not the exigency of the situation in the Indian Church to transcend the ritual barriers, rise up to its national concerns, and give priority to evangelization at any cost? Can we Christians in India go on with a lethargic attitude of self-complacency and indifference to our basic duty of presenting the liberative values of Christianity to the great masses of the poor people in this country? Can we be indifferent to the call of the poor in this land for liberation? Is the religious pluralism in India a sufficient reason for us to keep a negative attitude towards missionary activities? Should we altogether stop our mission against the current threat of the fundamentalist groups? These are crucial issues as well as existential questions and challenges to the entire Church of India, and more importantly, to the Syro-Malabar Church who were the pioneers of faith in this land.

The identity of the Syro-Malabar Church in the forthcoming decades would depend upon how dynamically and with what united vision it gets into the field of evangelization in all corners of central and north India, especially in the current circumstances of fear of opposition, indifferentism, theological confusions, and loss of enthusiasm.

The Problem of the Boundary Restrictions

One of the reasons why the Thomas Christians could not become vibrant till the second half of the 20th century may be the boundary restrictions this community had to face. They were forbidden to go beyond Kerala for any organized ecclesiastical activity. This was due to the intricate ecclesiastical problems of juridical relationships between the various Rites in India. Many people could not understand and recognize the reality of the diversity of the ecclesial traditions in India. The three Rites or diverse ecclesial traditions went on for centuries without much mutual interaction and collaboration. However, the year 1962 was a year of substantial transcendence from this pathetic situation. That golden moment for the whole Church of India was the inception of the Chanda mission. Historians call it *the Chanda Event*. In fact, if the Thomas Christians could have been permitted and encouraged to launch into the field of evangelization in the central and north India earlier, the missionary scene in those areas would have been very different today.

Regarding the boundary restrictions laid on the Malabar Church, Fr. Vadakekara is of opinion that the Malabar Christians ought to have been permitted and encouraged to extend their activities to the north. Such a policy would have also changed the image of Christianity in India being blamed as a western colonial power¹. He says, " Perhaps, if the Malabar Christians had been permitted to join their European brethren right from the start, today's detractors would not have been able to label the Catholic Church as a vestige of colonialism. By sidelining the Malabar Church from the scene of evangelization, the missionaries not only did a disservice to one of the most ancient Churches in the world, but they also were making a rod for the Catholic Church's own back. Certainly one of the ways of undoing this methodological error of the past is to permit these Christians of Malabar also to involve itself fully into the Church life on the national level."²

Fr. Vadakekara argues that the enforced territorial confinement of the Syro-Malabar Church obstructed the spotlight from falling fairly and squarely on the rich patrimony that the Lord Jesus had given to India in the person of the Apostle Thomas. According to him, it is the disparities in this symbiotic composition of the Catholic Church in India, created purely by historical reasons, that inhibits the full identity of the locally born ecclesial community from shining forth.

The Significant Breakthrough in the 1960s

The Syro-Malabar Church received a great boost as regards evangelization is concerned in the second half of the 20th century. Its credit may go chiefly to the Little Flower Mission League originated in the tiny little town of Bharananganam, the place blest by the Blessed Sr. Alphonsa. Blessed Alphonsa was beatified by the Holy Father John Paul II, along with Blessed Kuriackose Elias Chavara, the founder of the CMI Congregation, in Kottayam on 8th February 1986. Hundreds of our youth received inspiration from this Mission League to go to North India and join the team of missionaries there. The 19th Centenary Jubilee Celebrations of the Church of St. Thomas Christians, the historic visit of Cardinal Tisserant, a great lover of the Oriental Church, to Kerala, and the discouragement of foreign missionaries to come to India following the Niyogi Committee Report on the governmental level, also gave a boost to local vocations. This new wave for vocations from the

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1. Fr. Benedict Vadakekara. *Journal of St. Thomas Christians*, Jan-March, 2003, p. 53.
 2. Fr. Benedict Vadakekara, *ibid*, p. 54.

Syro-Malabar families was also inspired and strengthened by the several new Religious Congregations which emerged in the Syro-Malabar Church in the 20th century, namely, V.C., C.S.T., M.C.B.S., M.M.B., M.S.T., S.A.B.S., S.H., C.H.F., S.D., M.S.J., A.S.M.I., M.S.M.I., D.S.T. and so on.

However, in the year 1962 the Syro-Malabar Church entered into the heartland of India with a new vision, a new mandate and a new dynamism. The 31st March 1962 was that golden day in the history of evangelization in Central India. It was on that day the Holy Father Pope John XXIII created an independent Ecclesiastical Territory separating from the Archdiocese of Nagpur two civil districts of Chandrapur and Wardha from the State of Maharashtra and the district of Adilabad from Andhra Pradesh. It was constituted as an 'Ordinariate' naming it 'Chanda'. It was a historical event since that was the first mission territory handed over to the Syro-Malabar Church outside the boundaries of Kerala.

The name of the then Archbishop of Nagpur Most Rev. Eugene D'Souza deserves special mention here. It was he who discovered and recognized the hidden talents and missionary potentials of the Syro-Malabar Church. He took the initiative to invite them to Central India and entrust them with a part of his Archdiocese for evangelization. He made history by that decision. However, in that brave endeavour he had to face a lot of opposition. Archbishop Eugene was a man of far-reaching vision and a great personality who was able to think beyond boundaries, whatever they may be, for the sole aim of a greater boost in evangelization in Central India. He was particular that the new ecclesiastical head of that territory, Bishop Januarius, would take charge of the new territory on 3rd July, the feast of St. Thomas, a day very dear to the Syro-Malabar community. However, the official papers from Rome did not arrive in time. Hence, Archbishop desired that Bishop Januarius say his first Mass in Pulgaon near Wardha in the territory of the new mission on that day, and it was rightly done. On 15th August 1962, the anniversary of India's Independence and the Feast of the Assumption, the new Mission Territory of Chanda was officially entrusted to the CMI Congregation and Fr. Januarius, CMI, was made the head of that territory. The small but significant function took place in the Archbishop's House in Nagpur. It was officiated by the Representative from the then Internuncio. Archbishop Eugene D'Souza of Nagpur, three Bishops of the neighbouring dioceses, Fr. Maurus, Prior General of the CMIs, Fr. Francis Sales, the then Provincial of Kalamassery, and only a handful of Priests were present on that historic occasion. The event did not make big headlines in the newspapers.

Bishop Januarius' Integral Vision of Mission

The background factors that gave shape to the integral missionary vision of Bishop Januarius are to be traced to mainly two elements, namely, his deep-rooted ecclesial sense and his single-minded determination to achieve what he visualized. He was fully convinced that the Holy See entrusted this mission territory to his stewardship with the unique intention of direct evangelization. He was a person with a deep-rooted love for the Church. He imbibed the spirit of St. Thomas the Apostle who said 'let us also go and die with him'. He personalized the missionary zeal of St. Paul, the prophetic vision of Prophet Elijah and the ecclesial commitment of Blessed Chavara his spiritual guide. He used to share with his co-workers that the Carmelite charism is the charism of evangelization itself emerging from an intense personal God-experience and the resulting love of God's people. Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel was burning with zeal for God and for his kingdom. The spirituality of St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux and Blessed Chavara who were the stalwarts in the Carmelite charism, was a down to earth ecclesial spirituality. Bishop Januarius realized this patrimony personally and he inspired his co-workers saying that for us the Carmelite charism is a definite support and a motivating force in order to become effective missionaries.

More Syro-Malabar Dioceses outside Kerala to the fore

Following the monumental success of the Chanda Mission, the Holy See created many more Syro-Malabar Mission Dioceses in various parts of central and north India: Sagar, Satna and Ujjain in 1968, Jagdalpur and Bijnor in 1972, Rajkot in 1977, Gorakhpur in 1984, and Adilabad in 1999. Meantime, two other Dioceses created outside Kerala for the migrant St. Thomas Christians were Kalyan in 1988 and Chicago in 2001. Thus, at present 12 out of the total of 25 Syro-Malabar Dioceses are outside the boundaries of Kerala. These realities usher in a new era in the growth of the Thomas Christians, especially in the field of evangelization.

Responding positively to a new Identity and Responsibility

Last half a century, in comparison to its 20 centuries of existence in India in the past, could be termed as the golden era of evangelization in the history of Thomas Christians so far. This was the era in which the Thomas Christians received a substantial opening and a great boost for its missionary character. In fact, it was a belated opportunity given to this dynamic Church full of resources and capable personnel. This Church was the most flourishing Church among all the Eastern Churches.

Remaining always faithful to the original Apostolic heritage, adapted itself to the signs and needs of the times, it grew ever dynamic and vibrant. The main characteristics of the vibrancy of the faith of this Church were: integrity of their marriage bonds and family system, the handing down of faith and morals through a strong parental lineage, the tradition of the daily family prayer wherein all the members of the family gather together under the leadership of the head of the family, and great respect given for Religious and Priestly Vocations. It is exactly the same spirit that has to pave the way of inspiration for a new vision of evangelization to be brought into the central and northern India today, that which the children of the Malabar Church can confidently and effectively do.

There are miles and miles to travel in order to achieve this target. The several mission territories already given to it, must be regarded as a God given opportunity for evangelization. Instead of falling into an attitude of self-complacency and fulfillment, now is the time for it to gear up all its personnel and resources for the same cause with greater vigour and enthusiasm. More than ever before, now is the time and now is the exigency to take up new and innovative challenges in the missionary field. Never before has the Church in India faced challenges to its missionary services as today. There is an ever growing socio-religious fundamentalism and the resulting prejudices and a new culture of mutual suspicion and inherent hatred overpowering human minds from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Missionaries are persecuted and killed. Missionary institutions are targeted from various corners. Added to that, legislations are coming one after another in various States to control and suffocate the activities of the missionaries. Even the word *conversion* is misinterpreted with a fanatic tone. Hence, conversion is considered to be a heinous *crime*. Many Indians forget the fact that change of ones faith and religious affiliation is a constitutional right of every citizen in India. According to our Constitution Art. No. 25, every citizen in India is guaranteed freedom not only to change over to and practise any religious trend but also to propagate the same to others. However, the emerging scenario of organized attacks on the missionaries and their institutions has created a peculiar situation in this so-called *free, democratic and a genuinely spiritual Country*. There is an increasing politicization of the religious reality in India today. The discussion on whether our Indian culture is monolithic or not, is gaining new momentum and new interpretations. There is a strong emerging current of thought that denies the reality of the existence of many religious and ethnic currents in this great land. They even forget the great saying in

our ancient Sacred Scripture which welcomes any new religious innovation: *Ano Bhadra kratavo yanthu vishwatah: Let noble thoughts enter here from any part of the globe*³.

However, it is also a fact that the above-mentioned negative situations have started affecting the enthusiasm of the missionaries all over the nation. Many of them doubt why should they go ahead with the works of evangelization? Why should they *offend* the feelings of other communities; why should they take the risk of inviting attacks on the institutions? Instead why can't they just carry on with their institutions as merely social institutions ruling out every aspect of bearing witness to Jesus and his Gospel values. Some even stand for the view of expressing that *we haven't come here for evangelization at all*. Added to these arguments, there is also a new theological current of thought emerging in the sense: *In the light of the religious pluralism of this land, it is better not to emphasis the concept of evangelization*. All these currents of thought and the increasing attacks on them have created confusion, discouragement and indifference in the minds of many missionaries today. Against this new scenario, it is relevant to see what the challenges are to the missionaries today in the mission areas of central and north India specifically.

The Challenges to the Thomas Christians in the 21st century India

The first challenge to the Thomas Christians, as Indian Christians existing in India since 2000 years, is to show forth the indigenous character of Christianity in India. In north India, Christian religion is often considered to be a western and alien religion. Only very few educated people know that this is a religion that has been existing in India for the last 2000 years. Few know that Jesus was an Asian. Dr. M.N. Srinivasan says, "The Church in India was indeed a foreign importation, an alien imposition, and a relic of colonialism. When Europeans dominated the world and colonized many nations, they had a natural belief in the superiority of their race and religion over their subjects along with their tyrannical rule, religious tyranny matched by political tyranny"⁴. In fact, the general trend in parts of India beyond Kerala is that Christianity is western in origin and culture. To a large extent, the life-style of the Christians also have caused this impression in the minds of people. However, the people belonging to other religions in Kerala never thought that Christians were western or alien.

3. Rigveda, 1.89.i.

4. Dr. M.N. Srinivasan, Conversion to Christianity, Aggression in India,

Hence, it is the privilege and duty of the Thomas Christians, who are culturally well integrated in this land, to show that Christianity is part and parcel of the civilization of this land and Christians are no less patriotic or less involved in the socio-cultural and political activities of India.

The second challenge before the Thomas Christians today consists in getting more vigorously in the field for the upliftment of the poor. It is a fact that there is stark poverty in the areas of central and north India. Very often, the governmental authorities as well as the high castes are least concerned about the development of these unfortunate ones. The poor people need support, empowerment and guidance if they have to achieve any development. According to the policy proclamation of Jesus as shown forth in Lk.4:18, the poor are waiting for the good news of liberation. One of the key factors of evangelization must be this uplift of the poor. In north India, why there is an opposition to evangelization is that the missionaries are liberating the poor people from the exploitation of the landlords. Therefore, if we are abandoning evangelization, we will be primarily abandoning the essence of the mission of Jesus himself, and the very identity of Christianity will be getting lost. Therefore, there is relevance and imperative urgency in this matter.

The third challenge facing the Thomas Christians is to send more resources and personnel to the Syro-Malabar dioceses outside Kerala. At present this collaboration is not concerted and vibrant. There should be greater contact and cooperation between the mother Church and their missionaries toiling in the north. There should be a mechanism to keep constant contact between the mother Church and its missionary dioceses in the north. The mother Church should positively gear up and encourage missionary vocations to these missionary dioceses as well as the Religious Congregations working there.

The fourth challenge consists in the need of greater collaboration with the Latin Church in these missionary areas. The Thomas Christians and their ecclesial identity in the central and north Indian missionary dioceses should not become mere extensions or branches of the Syro-Malabar Church beyond Kerala. Rather than emphasizing their oriental identity and traditions, they should concentrate there chiefly on direct evangelization, that too, in close collaboration with the neighbouring Latin dioceses. Our Syro-Malabar dioceses in those areas must actively participate in the deliberations of the Regional Bishops' Conferences on the problems and prospects of evangelization, transcending the ritual

diversities. What is of paramount importance and priority in these mission areas at present is evangelization.

The fifth factor that the Syro-Malabar Church in the north has to take into account is the need of keeping our new Christian families in the integrity of their faith and moral life. There are numerous families who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Master, especially during the last half a century. Their Christian faith must be strengthened through consistent pastoral action. Special care must be taken to bring up their children in the fundamentals of Christian values. Their sacramental life must be made vibrant and unfluctuating, making their daily life more sublime. Their moral life must be made so upright as to remove the impression that Christians are alcoholically addicted, violent and having a loose moral life. Their social life must be founded on unity, sharing and mutual concern and become an imitable example for other communities, just as the new Christians of the Acts of the Apostles. They should be given excellent educational opportunities so that they may also have good self-respect, transcending their inborn inferiorities due to the caste-ridden mentality of the society. Let them also enter active political life just like the other citizens and be guided to bring about a value-based new political atmosphere in this Country which is being rent apart on account of corruption, communalism and disregard for the poor.

Finally, it is the duty and privilege of the Thomas Christians to take the initiative in making a more concerted and united effort of missionary work in the central and northern parts of India. In this great process and effort, the Thomas Christians need not compete with, nor imitate any one, but become a prophetic challenge for the entire Church of India, with a unique approach to evangelization, giving priority to the integrity of the families, a value-based educational system, a special concern for the poor, and a socio-cultural symbiosis entering the mainstream of the national life and becoming full-fledged citizens participating in the building up of mother India.

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Latin Church in India

Question of Identity and Present Challenges

S. Arulsamy

The Latin Church in India is the largest of the three Catholic Churches. Its history is traced to the colonial times from the sixteenth century onwards and it is indebted to the strenuous efforts of the European Missionaries, especially Portuguese. Rev. Dr. S. Arulsamy who had long been the Secretary of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) discusses the identity of this Church in its different aspects and its relation to the other Churches.

0. Introduction

The Catholic Community in India is not a homogenous community. The Church in India in reality is a communion of three ritual churches: the Syro-Malabar church, the Latin church and the Syro-Malankara church. These three churches did not emerge or grow out of interaction between the word of God and the particular socio-cultural and religious milieu people lived in.

Christianity is based on the primordial experience of the risen Lord Jesus Christ by the apostolic community. This primordial experience communicated by the apostolic preaching (*kerygma*) is found recorded in the Scriptures. This message was taken to different parts of the world by the preaching of the apostles and their followers. People, who accepted the preaching, responded to it in faith, - a faith that resulted in Christian fellowship. The 'word of life' entered into the daily Christian living and took the concrete form of spirituality and discipline. Thus, having the word as the central reality they believed, celebrated and lived, the Christian communities (the churches) took on concrete form in terms

of liturgy, catechesis, theology, spirituality and discipline¹. From this it is clear that an authentic church can emerge only with a free and healthy interaction between the word of God and humans of a given place.

Such a thing did not take place in India either during the period of origin or during the period of evangelization of Christianity. During the former period, the encounter of the word of God by another people (Chaldeans) and in a different cultural milieu was imposed on St. Thomas Christians. Similarly, during the latter period in the 16th century transplantation into Indian soil of a Western form of Christianity took place. Due to the political power, it had almost become a normative form of Christianity in India. Thus the churches in India have not "sprung from our Indian experience of Jesus, come in our own flesh, dwelling in our midst and bearing our wounds."² That is to say, we do not have a church that has developed from our own meeting God in Christ and shaping for itself a social body and symbol system out of our own life and culture. The churches in India are the replicas of Chaldean, Roman and Antiochean churches.

1. Latin Church in India

1.1. The Latin Church³

The Catholic church that was brought into the Indian soil from 16th century onwards was the Latin church. It grew out of missions organized in the context of colonial adventures of Portuguese mercantilism. The

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1. Cf. Mathew Vellanickal, "Perspectives on Identity of St. Thomas Christians" in *Mission in India Today*, ed by Kuncheria Pathil CMI (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications 1988), pp. 88-91.
 2. Samuel Rayan S.J., "The Ecclesiology at work in the Indian Church Today", in *Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology*, ed by Gerwin van Leuwen o.f.m., (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1984), p. 196
 3. I am not comfortable to use the words "Latin church in India". I would have rather preferred to use simply "The Church in India", for as Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI). I had taken lot of troubles to argue and convince the Holy See why we cannot use the words "Latin Rite" for CCBI. Finally the Holy See accepted our arguments and had granted permission to drop the words "Latin Rite" for CC BI. However, because there are in this issue articles dealing with two other Catholic Oriental churches, I am reconciled rather reluctantly to use the words and thus avoid also confusion.

extension of the Latin church was effected in the semicolonial and colonial periods of India's history. It was achieved by missionaries coming mostly from imperial metropolises and enjoying the protection and favour of Government and armies. The Latin church in India has therefore, the colonial character which finds expression in numerous ways.

Due to the strenuous efforts of the missionaries, the Latin church had spread over the vast geographical expanse of the Indian subcontinent. It had also the patronage of political powers.

However, the Latin church in India does not refer to a concrete reality, but to something that is abstract. What concretely exist are the Latin rite Dioceses with their structures and institutions, which together constitute the Latin church in India. The Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) is an institutional organization of bishops which, though does not represent the whole of the Latin church, can be said to be equivalent to the Latin church at national level. The Constitution on the Church has drawn a similarity between Individual churches and Episcopal Conferences in that they are concrete realization of the collegiate spirit. "In a like fashion the episcopal conferences at the present time are in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegiate spirit." (LG. 23). Hence, while speaking about the identity of the Latin Church, I am using indiscriminately the Episcopal Conference of the Latin church, namely the **Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI)** for the Latin church itself.

1.2. India Today

The reflection on the Latin Church does not refer to the period when India was politically under foreign domination, but to the period of independent India. In other words, we are not concerned here with India of our past history, but with India of present day.

The independent India initially was pre-occupied with 'nation-building'. The efforts to nation building were manifest in building up infrastructures of education and health institutions leading the nation towards the path of industrial development.

The society in independent India is clearly in a state of transition. It is moving from colonialism towards a mode of dependent capitalism despite its socialistic pretensions. The slow economic growth rate with

a distorted production and distribution pattern and the increasing number of illiterate and educated unemployed youth, the growing number of small farmers losing land and the swelling army of landless labourers, the growing number of farmers committing suicides because of failure of monsoon and harvest is creating convulsions in social and economic and political spheres. "Today India is passing through a period of crisis. The symptoms of this crisis are evident, varied and widespread. The growing restlessness of youth, the spate of strikes and lock-outs, the terrible inhuman atrocities inflicted on harijans, tribals and other weaker section of society, increasing communal conflicts, a growing cynicism about the political parties, politicians crossing the floor with disdain - these and many other facts indicate a deep malaise within the Indian Society."⁴

India is also marked by appalling poverty, which is caused by unjust structures of society hierarchically stratified like the layers of a cake. While a small minority of Indian population enjoys greater portion of the riches of the country, the bulk of the population is either struggling to remain on or above the poverty line and another bulk of over 300 millions are below the poverty line.

All these evil consequences find reinforced in the new economic policy (NEP) started by Shri Rajiv Gandhi, given shape during reign of Shri Narasimha Rao under the leadership of Dr. Manmohan Singh and continued by the present NDA government. "Globalization" is the term that describes the Indian economy. Globalization is a sustained effort to instill into the psyche of all people, the new mantra of our age, *One world, One currency*. The professed hope of this policy is that it will bring "growth-based development" geared to eliminate hunger, poverty and disease. The effect of this shift is to be a *new World trade* order, the stimulation of investment and the creation of many more jobs.

However, this policy has become a means for the capitalists to internationalize their capitalistic system and production relationships. The NEP has resulted in sociological unconcern, displacement of peoples and destruction of human communities. The NEP will only perpetuate economic inequality. The greed of a few is doing violence to our heritage

4. D.S. Amalorpavadoss, (ed), *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society* (Bangalore: NBCLC 1981) FS. No.10, p.44.

and resources, destroying the environment, damaging eco-support systems and instigating hatred between cultures and peoples. Thus it militates against the establishing of the values of justice, peace and fellowship upon the earth. On the whole the NEP has only increased the marginalization of the Dalits, the Tribals, women and children, backward classes and unorganized labourers. The newspaper *Deccan Herald* of June 23, 2003 reports that Globalization is the main cause of suicides in Kerala.

The independent India was also marked with revival of Hinduism leading to the assertion of its relevance for Indians and to the marginalization of Christianity by several steps: new moves were made to stop the inflow of missionaries to India; discrimination was made in reservation to the SC and ST Christians in order to stop conversion to Christianity; anti-conversion bills were introduced and passed in some States; attempts were made even at the level of central Government to pass such a bill; Christians were disparaged as unpatriotic, foreign-religion based and as belonging to the low castes. Such moves finally got petrified in Hindutva ideology and fundamentalist attitude towards the minority, especially against the Christians and the Muslims.

The Church in India in the beginning responded to this situation of the country by starting educational and health institutions in great numbers and by starting social service societies to plan several development projects. In seventies a *new consciousness* had emerged in the understanding of poverty of the country and the ways and means of meeting the problem. This new consciousness revealed that the input model of projects benefited only the middle class people as well as the rich who had increased their capacity to appropriate the benefits of education and health institutions. This paved the way for the emergence of liberation movements in the country. The Church personnel began to take active involvement at the grassroots level to educate the poor and the exploited masses; several training programmes, cultural tools, media and group discussions were used to organize people.

The political independence has enabled the Church in India find its own identity. But the difficulties it is facing in the process of indianization is symptomatic of the dialectical relationship between the local Indian Church and the ancient origins of Catholicism in India.

2. Identity of the Latin Church

2.1. Identity in the Past

The identity of any church very much depends upon the underpinning Ecclesiology. As the Latin church in India is nothing but a replica of the Latin church worldwide, its identity will not be very much different from the identity of the Latin church worldwide. This identity can be described in a sketchy way in the following words:⁵

Of course the Latin church like any other church, owes its origin to the community of disciples gathered around Jesus and commissioned by him to continue his mission. Though the community of Jesus' disciples was a movement in the beginning, in course of time, it became institutionalized with all its related structures of doctrine, rituals, rules and regulations, as is the case with any other movement.

In course of historical development, the church assumed a pyramidal model with the Pope and bishops at the top and simple and ordinary Catholics at the base. Vis-à-vis the world and other faiths, the church assumed the Jewish particularism, exclusivism and absolutism.

However, going beyond the boundaries of Palestine, the community had to accommodate itself to the new situation. "Acceptance of the Gospel does not demand acceptance of an alien culture and suppression of one's own culture. Thus the particularism of Jewish Christianity was broken through and a universalistic vision of Christianity emerged..."⁶

The church of the Roman Empire followed the political, imperial and feudalistic model in its life, structures, authority and organization. Its self-understanding was along the imperial and political model as a hierarchically and highly structured institution.

Then came the colonial period during which Christian faith was brought to India in a significant way. The identity of the Church that

5. I am indebted for this section to Fr. Kuncheria Pathil, CMI. "The Self-Understanding of the Church in India Today" - a paper presented at the XXI Annual Meeting of Indian Theological Association. Cf. Also Kuncheria Pathil, CMI, "A New Vision of the Church in a Pluralistic Society", in Dr. S. Arulsamy (ed), *Communalism in India: A Challenge to Theologizing* (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 1988), pp. 139-154.

6. Kuncheria Pathil, *Ibid.*, p.5.

emerged into India would be the identity of the church in the Western Europe.

With the onset of democracy in the world and with the discovery and recognition of pluralism in religion, culture, ideology and life-style, the self-understanding of the Church has undergone a change. The Papal-monarchical and pyramidal Ecclesiology gave way to communion model and to People of God Ecclesiology of Vatican II.

2.2. Towards a new Identity

The Latin Church in India, which had inherited the above identity, could not keep the same image and identity.

In normal circumstances one does not think of one's own identity. But one may be compelled to become conscious of one's identity when one realizes that there are other similar beings challenging one's identity. At times polarization of realities may be an occasion for becoming conscious of one's identity. Speaking of the development of a sense of identity of Israel, Fr. L. Legrand says: "Biblical text bears ample evidence that Israel developed a sense of identity in opposition to the surrounding world. Israel perceives itself as Israel in a revolt against its surroundings - Egypt or Canaan."⁷ The identity of the Latin Church was challenged on the one hand by the situation of independent India and on the other by the rite tangle among the churches in India.

2.2. 1. The Rite Tangle among the Churches in India

Starting from the Second Vatican Council and the All India Seminar (1969) the rite problem has been vexing the churches in India. The inter-ritual controversy was triggered by late Cardinal Parecattil, the then President of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI). In his presidential address at the General Body meeting of CBCI in Hyderabad (1976) he said:

"The term 'Episcopal Conference' as such refers to the assembly of the Bishops of the Latin rite, while that of the Bishops of the Oriental rites is called 'Synod'."

Basing on the commentary of Klews Mordoff on *Christus Dominus* (CD) 38 §1-6, he stated that "it is doubtful if an Episcopal Conference

7. Lucien Legrand MEP, *The Bible on Culture*, (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001), p. 15.

with juridical status can be formed out of members belonging to different rites." Hence "its (CBCI's) decisions by themselves cannot have a legally binding force at least on the Orientals." This was further strengthened by the Latin Code of Canon Law. It stated that the members of an Episcopal Conference are bishops of the Latin church and bishops of other rites within the same territory may be invited to attend its meeting but they will have only consultative votes. The canon 450 §1 reads:

"By virtue of the law, the following persons in the territory belong to the Episcopal Conference: all the diocesan Bishops and those equivalent to them in law; all coadjutor Bishops, auxiliary Bishops and other titular Bishops who exercise in the territory a special office assigned to them by the Apostolic See or by the Episcopal Conference. Ordinaries of another rite may be invited, but have only a consultative vote, unless the statutes of the Episcopal Conference decree otherwise".

Actually this canon was in contradiction to CD 38 §2 which says:

"Members of the Episcopal Conference are all local Ordinaries of every rite, coadjutors, auxiliaries, and other titular Bishops who perform a special work entrusted to them by the Apostolic See or the Episcopal Conference."

On February 27, 1982 Archbishop Simon Pimenta of Bombay as the President of CBCI wrote to Holy See requesting that the draft of the Schema, which was to be Canon 450 §1, should be revised in line with CD 38 §2. His letter was passed on to the Pontifical Commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law. On April 24, 1982 Archbishop R.J.Castillo Lara, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission wrote in reply to Archbishop Simon Pimenta:

"I beg to inform you in this context that the Episcopal Conference being an institution of an essentially pastoral nature and which concerns primarily the responsibility of governing the bishops of the Latin church, it seems advisable that the general norms be those contained in the above mentioned Canon of the Schema. This, however, should not affect the actual norms of your Conference. These in fact correspond to particular pastoral circumstances of India and according to what we learnt have already received the formal approval of the Holy See." (Prot N. 48438/82)

On August 6, 1982 when the final draft was in the hands of the Pope, Archbishop Simon Pimenta wrote again to the Pope himself, requesting that the text be submitted to a last minute amendment. He wrote:

"In studying the membership of the Conference against the background of the draft Canons of the new Code, it was felt that Canon 325 §1 (now 450 §1) of the proposed Code detracts from the equal status which the bishops of the country of all rites have been enjoying upto now in the Conference...."

"The Canon envisages the membership of the bishops of other rites not de jure but only by invitation and with a consultative vote, and thus places them in an inferior position contrary to the practice in India obtaining for the last 40 years. This stands out as discriminatory, particularly in our country, where there are 88 Latin bishops and 24 Oriental bishops."

"The role an Episcopal Conference in a country is well spelt out in Canon 322 (now 447) and the pastoral good referred to in the Canon engaged in the ministry of the country be accorded equal membership. It has been the practice of the bishops' conference in India and other countries - in U.S.A., Canada, Brazil - to accord equal membership to bishops of all rites."

"This Conference submits that because it concerns the very dignity and role of bishops as such and because of the long and favourable experience which has obtained in India in this matter, Canon 325 §1 (now 450 §1), even at this late stage be suitably amended."

Immediately after this letter, Cardinal J. Parecattil as President of Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference (at that time it was called so) wrote also to the Pope making a contrary representation and favouring that the draft text of the controversial canon be maintained.

On August 6 1982 in a discourse Archbishop R.J. Castillo Lara, the Pro-Prefect of the Commission for the Code of Canon Law presented the new Code and singled out that fidelity to the Council as the first principle that guided the revision of the Code. In reaction to this Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar wrote to him on February 3, 1983:

"I humbly submit that the present wording of Canon 450 §1 does not seem to follow the criterion of fidelity to the Council, so well

enunciated in your discourse. This fact is also of deep concern for our Episcopal Conference as it may lead to grave pastoral problems creating disunity and divisions because of ritual differences.

The Episcopal Conferences should comprise all Ordinaries of any rite working in a given territory. Pastoral considerations would seem to call for such structure, particularly in a country where the church is a small minority and where Ordinaries of different rites have been working together for so many decades. An inter-ritual Conference should be the normal organization for a church in a given territory if we wish to have common planning and effective representation in ecclesial matters."

Archbishop Lara answered the above letter on April 20 1983 (Prot N. 4998/83). He recalled that the question raised has already been "carefully considered" by the Pontifical Commission and referred to his previous answer to Archbishop Simon Pimenta. He summed up the reasons for the norm laid down in the Canon 450 §1:

- 1) Since the CIC is the universal law of the Latin church (Cf. Can 1), the inclusion of laws which would have a binding character also on the bishops of the other Catholic rites have been purposely avoided;
- 2) Since besides aiming at the exchange of pastoral experience and information of common interest etc., the Episcopal Conferences constitute in the Latin church a hierarchical structure having also a legislative function, it does not seem logical to grant deliberative and so decision-making and binding votes to bishops of other rites (Similarly it will not be logical for the Latin bishops to be given deliberative vote in the Synods of the Oriental churches).
- 3) However, to make provision for the special pastoral circumstances obtaining in some nations such as those as stressed by Your Excellency, to the general norm of Canon 450 §1 has been added to the text "*Nisi episcoporum conferentiae statuta aliud decernant*" (Unless the statutes of the Episcopal Conference decree otherwise).
- 4) It will, therefore, be for the competent Dicasteries of the Holy See to decide, while approving the statutes, on the opportuneness or otherwise of granting deliberative (and so binding for all the churches represented) vote in the case of each Episcopal Conference of inter-ritual character.

2.2. 2. *Cultural Shock*

The promulgation of the Latin Code of Canon Law with no amendment to the above mentioned canon 450 §1 had aggravated the problem. The walk-out of the Oriental bishops at the General Body meeting of CBCI in 1984 at Nagpur refusing to vote on the adaptations to some canons of CIC, when CBCI itself was then functioning according to the directives and provisions of Latin Code, created legal problem. Memoranda and counter-memoranda and representation from both Latin rite bishops and Oriental rite bishops to the Holy See were made.

When the Holy Father John Paul II visited India in 1986 the bishops of India requested him to settle the problem as early as possible. The Holy Father in his address to the bishops of India assured them that as soon as possible he would give a just and fair settlement of issues taking into account all the pastoral exigencies of unity and truth. Finally, on May 27 1987 he gave his decision and directive by a letter addressed to the Bishops of India. While the Oriental bishops hailed the letter as 'historic', the Latin rite bishops felt humiliated and were disappointed. However, as the loyal sons of the Mother Church and in true Christian faith, they accepted the decision and were looking forward towards a new beginning for their church. The essential part of the papal letter reads thus:

"The Bishops of each of the three Rites have the right to establish their own Episcopal bodies in accordance with their own ecclesiastical legislation. The National Conference of all Catholic Bishops of India is to continue for questions of common concern and of a national and supra-ritual character, e.g., Doctrine and Morals, Organizations of a national and supra-ritual character, questions involving the Catholic Church and the Government, etc. These areas are to be determined in the National Conference" new Statutes to be approved by the Holy See (cf. *Christus Dominus* 38; Code of Canon Law, 449ff)."

Following this decision a cultural shock took place in the Church in India. The unitary Episcopal Conference known then as "Catholic Bishops' Conference of India" (CBCI) had a great shock which created an irremediable rupture. This rupture resulted in the emergence of four Episcopal Bodies in India. Nevertheless, pluralism has its own value. It is a sign of perfection and an inescapable fact of history.

Speaking of the new situation created by the papal letter and the need for the Latin church to look for a new way of being present in India and function, Archbishop Henry D'Souza in his presidential address in Goa in 1991 said:

"A new culture has been introduced into the Church in India in which the ritual differences have to be reckoned with. Henceforth they may not be considered as marginal to Church administration and practice... The new cultural instability in the Church in India is in fact a condition for growth and freshness. Many are not prepared attitudinally or theologically for this situation. Reaction to cultural disorientation by cosmetic or even structural change, however substantial, will not produce the desired results. Attitudinal changes and consistent decisions are required...The times offer great possibilities."⁸

2.2.3. Identity Crisis

Experience has shown that the above decision of the Holy Father has brought in a new set of problems. There is a confusion with regard to the identity of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) and the Latin church, because another Episcopal Body, namely the CBCI which has no more canonical *locus standi* continues to call itself a 'national Conference' and keeps with it those areas of operation which normally should go to the Episcopal bodies. The paradox is that while the two other Oriental churches have established all the Commissions they would like to have under their purview, the CCBI is unable to do so, because its own members are objecting to it. According to the Code of Canon Law there can be only one national Episcopal Conference in a country. The studies made on '*Apostolos Suos*' have very clearly confirmed it⁹. The presence of another national Episcopal Conference, which is *praeter legem*, continues to be a constant threat to the identity and competence of a canonically national Episcopal Conference, the CCBI (the Latin Church).

8. Henry D'Souza, "Changing Church Culture in India" - A Presidential Address, in *The Report of the General Body Meeting of the CCBI, 1991* (Goa: CCBI Publications, 1991), pp. 47-48.

9. Cf. S. Arulsamy (ed). *In the Light of Apostolos Suos of John Paul II: A Study on the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conferences*, (New Delhi: Published by Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, 1999).

This identity crisis is also due to confusion in the minds of some of the Latin rite bishops with regard to their sense of belonging. The dual membership of the Latin rite bishops in CCBI and CBCI has created this confusion with regard to identity of the Latin Church. The bishops of the Latin Church first and foremost have to become aware of their identity. It is important that they know what is the institution, which they belong to. They need to realize that assertion of the identity of CCBI does not deny the identity of CBCI. It only means becoming authentic to oneself. The dual membership of the Latin rite bishops has to be properly understood. There can be various levels of belonging. For example, a human being first and foremost belongs to his family of mother and father, of sisters and brothers. That is his first identity and also authenticity. It may happen that in some cases he also belongs at the same time to an extended family (joint family) of uncles and aunts, and cousins. The fact of belonging to an extended family does not, and cannot take away his identity of belonging to his immediate family. The same person also belongs to his village community and to a particular ethnic group, to particular region and to a nation. He is expected to be faithful to all these different layers of belonging. But he can never forget his first and immediate belonging to his family.

Similarly, the Latin rite bishops first and foremost are members of their church and its organizations. That is their identity. And then only they are members of another organizations like the CBCI. Allegiance to a body should be on the basis of closeness of one's being to it and not on the basis of chronological priority. As this has not been properly understood by some bishops, the identity of CCBI is at stake and so they are not able to define the areas of its competence also. As a consequence there is an identity crisis.

2.2. 4. A new Identity of the Latin Church

In the Latin church every Diocese is a local Church and its spiritual leader is the bishop who enjoys certain amount of autonomy, which a national Episcopal Conference does not have. The theological and juridical nature of a national Episcopal Conference has not been fully clarified even after issuing the Apostolic Letter *Apostolos Suos*. However, there is no other way of identifying the Latin Church in India except through its national Episcopal Conference. The purpose of an Episcopal Conference is principally pastoral, spiritual and evangelical.

Therefore, at national level this Conference has a certain authority, which is sacramental and moral, though not juridical. Hence, it can evolve its own identity vis-à-vis the pastoral and moral life of the church as a whole and vis-à-vis the society which it is called to serve. With this understanding, the Latin church in India today is in the process of building up its identity.

The permanent recognition of the statutes of the CCBI has given it an identity of its own. CCBI is a national Conference in India representing 118 Dioceses in India. It is the biggest Conference in whole of Asia. Permission granted by the Holy See to drop the tag 'Latin Rite' (LR) is a first step towards becoming authentically Indian. However, many more things need to be achieved in this process becoming authentically Indian.

By establishing all the operational set ups, the CCBI has become a pastorally full-fledged Conference. It has 10 Commissions under its purview to carry out its purpose. They are: Commission for Bible and Catechetics, Commission for Liturgy, Commission for Proclamation, Commission for Laity, Commission for Family, Commission for Vocation, Seminaries, Clergy and Religious, Commission for Ecumenism, Commission for Theology and Doctrine, Commission for Canon Law and Other Legislative Texts and Boundary Commission. The establishment of CCBI Centre: Offices for Commissions with five full time secretaries is another step towards establishing the identity

3. Present Challenges

The Church in India can become authentic only when it becomes relevant. The relevance of the Church has to be understood in terms of human persons, people, society, life etc. Only what is meaningful to the people, their needs, aspirations and situations can be said to be relevant. Identity and relevance are therefore, correlative.

3.1. Challenge to become authentically Indian

In independent India Christians are disparaged as 'unpatriotic' and 'foreign-religion-based'. This is because Christianity is identified with Western culture and has extra-territorial loyalty. The flow of foreign money in the form of annual subsidy and donations for maintenance and for the propagation of faith causes fear to the Hindus, and Christianity itself becomes suspect in the country. How are we to undo this wrong impression and image?

To get rid of such an image the Church in India should make efforts to become authentically Indian in its mode of presence, life style and activities. A community based on a religion, which had originated elsewhere in a different cultural context, should make all efforts possible to enter into the culture of the place where it lives. Religious affiliation need not imply belonging to a particular culture in which that religion originally was born. The Good News of salvation, which is the kernel of Christian faith, is above all cultures. But when it manifests and realizes itself concretely it assumes the culture of a particular place. Thus Christian revelation originated in Jewish culture and then clothed itself with the Greco-Roman culture or with the Syro-Chaldean culture. It is in these forms that Christianity entered into India. Now, the Christians in India are not justified in holding on to foreign cultures even after so many centuries. By doing so they alienate themselves culturally. Our religious identification with the foreign culture makes the Hindus think that our religion is also foreign. When a religion gives rise to a subculture (Christian culture here), it may become a threat to the culture of the country where it exists and thus become cause of suspicion and tension.

Religion has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The originality of religion is to be seen only in its vertical dimension. In its horizontal dimension it should be prepared to change its garb according to place and culture. "When a religion encounters other cultures there must be a scope for new expression... The mode of worship, even when it maintains a certain continuity with its original core, will have to evolve according to the particular culture of new peoples or the developments in the culture of the same people."¹⁰ If the Latin church in India were to become authentically Indian, it has to take steps towards this. How to do it is the present challenge to it.

3.2. Challenge to Autonomy

While the challenge to become authentic comes from the fact of the presence of Latin church in India, the challenge to become autonomous is thrown by the Oriental churches in India. The final statement of Sixteenth Annual meeting of Indian Theological Association in no.24 states that the Oriental churches are in the process of regaining their

10. Cf. George V. Lobo S.J., "The Church and Communalism in India" in Vidyajyothi, Vol. L/3 (1986), pp. 232-233, 240.

legitimate autonomy and invites the Latin church in India to do the same¹¹. This implies that the Latin church in India does not have the autonomy.

As mentioned above the Latin church as such is not a concrete reality. What concretely exists is the Latin rite diocese, which is a local church. As local church, it enjoys certain autonomy. "The bishops govern the particular churches assigned to them... their power which they exercise personally in the name of Christ, is proper, ordinary and immediate... The pastoral charge, that is the permanent and daily care of their sheep, is entrusted to them fully; nor are they to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff; for they exercise the power which they possess in their own right and are called in the truest sense of the term prelates of the people whom they govern." (LG. 27) Hence, what an Oriental church as individual church is said to enjoy with regard to autonomy, the Latin local or particular church (diocese) enjoys¹².

Nevertheless, a total of autonomy of any Catholic church whether Oriental or Latin is not possible since the Pope is the head of the communion of all these churches. It may be true that the Oriental churches have more autonomy with regard to administrative and juridical matters. Perhaps the Latin church in India, namely the CCBI could enter into dialogue and interaction with the Holy See with regard to getting more autonomy in administration and other non-essential matters. Will the bishops take up this challenge?

3.3. Extra-Territorial Loyalty

The promoters of Hindutva ideology think that because of 'extra-territorial loyalty' the Christians (Catholics to be precise) have not integrated themselves into the nation fully. Such a thinking was reflected in the recent invitation of Mr. Sudarson, the Head of *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (RSS) to the Christians in the country to liberate themselves from outside control. In other words, he was inviting the Christians to form a national Church as in China.

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11. Statement of the Indian Theological Association on "Issue of Rites in the Indian Church: A Theological Reflection" in Jacob Parapally MSFS (ed) *Theologizing in Context: Statements of Indian Theological Association* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2002), p. 204.
 12. Cf. Archbishop Henry D'Souza, *A Concise Report of 25 years of The Inter-Ritual Question 1969 - 1994* (Calcutta 1994), pp. 16-17.

It goes without saying that such demand and invitation are based on a wrong understanding of Christian religion and faith. Even though the Church is a communion of churches, this pluralism is not based on the criterion of a nation but on deeper level of spiritual heritages. However, the Church in India can still find out ways of becoming autonomous in areas, which do not touch faith and morals and areas which are not very essential for continuity, such as administration, mode of worship, adaptations etc. This is a real challenge to the Latin church in India. Will it be ready to take it up with the Holy See and enter into dialogue on these matters? Will the Church in India respond to it in an adequate and authentic way?

3.4. Challenge of Minority Situation

In Christianity all are considered to be children of God. Hence, there is no place for any discrimination. There is no distinction of male or female, Greek or Jew, slave or free man. In Christ Jesus all are brothers and sisters. However, when it is the question of demanding favour before the Government, we at once bring in the distinction of caste. Unfortunately because the Government makes discrimination in reservation to SC and ST people on the basis religion, we are forced to bring in the caste factor. Don't we, however, promote this cast consciousness among our people? How are we to overcome this conflictual situation? It is a challenge to the church. It seems that Christianity in India has only succeeded in inheriting the inequality structure persisting in the local culture¹³.

3.5. Relation between the CCBI and the CBCI

Another challenge to the church is that its identity will be called into question by other churches and especially by the way in which the Inter-ritual Episcopal Body (CBCI) would function and intrude into the areas of its competence. This will be a constant irritant to the effective functioning of the only national Episcopal Conference, viz., the CCBI.

The ambiguity that prevails with regard to the name of inter-ritual Episcopal Body, still called CBCI and with regard to its competence will continue to remain a constant challenge to the identity of CCBI. The historical context in which the directive of the Holy Father John

13. Cf. Christian W. Troll S.J., "Islam as Missionary Religion" in *Church and Islam* (Delhi:1983), pp. 139-140.

Paul II was given with regard to all these should throw some light. A study has already been made on this¹⁴. The conclusion of this study was that the decision of the Holy Father was on continuity of a national Body in India, and not on how it should be called. Hence, it is expedient for the CBCI to change its name to ACBI (Assembly of Catholic Bishops of India). This has been corroborated by interpretation of three Roman Dicasteries: the Congregation for the Evangelization of People, the Congregation for the Oriental churches and the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative texts. The particular Observation and Recommendations of the revised Statutes of CCBI states:

"It is to be noted that the Interdicasterial Commission responsible for the Statutes of CBCI retains that it is canonically expedient to drop the word "Conference" from the title of the CBCI."

A little further it again states:

"We agree completely with the position put forward that canonically speaking, the CCBI is the only canonical Conference in India."

It is rather sad to note that such a decision has been set aside and a contrary decision has been forced into.

Similarly also with regard to the competence of the CBCI. The directive of the Holy Father said that the areas are to be determined in the National Conference's Statutes, to be approved by the Holy See. Unfortunately neither the revision of CBCI's Statutes which took place in 1989 nor the one in 1996-97 took into consideration this directive and determine clearly the areas of competence of CBCI.

However, an attempt was made towards resolving the question of competence of CBCI in 1997. The Committee set up by the CBCI Standing Committee made some recommendations, which were acceptable to all the three churches. However, some vested interests intervened at the last moment and aborted the whole decision that had been made and accepted twice at the CBCI Standing Committee¹⁵.

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14. Cf. Fr. S. Arulsamy, "Why did the Holy Father use the word "Conference" for CBCI?" in *CCBI NEWS*, Vol. X, No. 1, March 1999, pp. 1-10. Cf. Also Fr. S. Arulsamy, "Pope John Paul II's Letter of May 27, 1987 re-visited" in *CCBI NEWS*, Vol. XI, No.2, June 2000, pp.43-59.
 15. Cf. *Report of the Standing Committee of the CBCI*, April 1997, p. 21; *Report of the Standing Committee of the CBCI*, September, 1997, pp. 10-11, 82-88; Fr. S. Arulsamy, "Pope John Paul II's Letter of May 27, 1987 Re-visited" in *CCBI NEWS*, Vol. XI, No.2, June 2000, pp. 48-51.

With the change of head at the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, the decision of the Congregation which was at its final stage has been reverted and a compromise solution was forced in at the General Body meeting of the CBCI, 2002 at Jalandhar. Though the Latin bishops accepted the decision as there was no other go, it is unfortunate that the decision taken in Jalandhar is not only not implemented but had been mitigated at a private meeting that took place in Cochin on the occasion of Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples' visit¹⁶.

Thus the unresolved question of name of CBCI and its competence will continue to remain a constant threat to the identity of the CCBI and thereby to the identity of the Latin Church in India.

3.6. Relation between the Oriental Churches and CCBI

It is often stated that the Syro-Malabar church and the Syro-Malankara church are the individual churches; whereas the Latin Rite church in India is not an individual church, but it is part of the Latin individual church worldwide. It may be called a particular church or a local church. Hence there cannot be a comparison of the Latin church in India with the other two Oriental churches either in status or in extension¹⁷. The Latin church in India being only particular or local church cannot restrict the functioning of the Oriental churches in the country which are equal to the Latin church worldwide in status and power. They also question the jurisdiction of the Latin church throughout India and assert that they have right to go to any part of India carry out the work of evangelization and establish their churches.

Another point that they constantly raise is the pastoral care of their faithful living within the jurisdiction of the Latin Diocese.

Vis-à-vis these claims and assertions the challenge before the Latin church is twofold: The first challenge is the assertion and claim to

16. Cf. The Annual Report of the Secretary-General of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) at the XV Plenary Assembly, under section 4. *Pontificio Annuario*

17. This distinction is based on different understanding of the Church as described by Second Vatican Council. While the Oriental bishops in India say that the Church is a communion of individual churches, the Latin bishops says that the Church is a communion of particular churches. Cf. Archbishop Henry D'Souza. "Individual Church and Particular Church" in *op.cit.*, p.16.

evangelize any part of the country without restriction and the pastoral care of their faithful. This has to be responded with pastoral perspective and in a spirit of collaboration and dialogue and of Christian charity.

The second challenge is the question of ecclesial status of the Latin church. This should be an occasion for the bishops of the Latin Rite church in India to creatively reflect on this challenging question namely, that the Latin church in India is only a particular church and that it cannot be in par with the Oriental churches; the Latin church has to enter into dialogue and interaction with the Holy See in order to enhance the image of the Latin church in India.

3.7. Challenge from within the CCBI

In spite of the clear canonical provision with regard to the Episcopal Conference, if still the CCBI remains crippled, it is due to the confused understanding of the membership of the Latin Bishops in the CCBI and CBCI.

Some of the bishops do not know the origin and development of CBCI, which emerged due to the initiatives of the Latin Metropolitans. Even though membership was extended to the bishops of the Oriental churches, at the operational level the CBCI has by and large remained a Latin organization. One does not find any of the CBCI Commissions having done anything to promote faith-formation of the Oriental faithful. Late Cardinal Joseph Parecattil of Syro-Malabar church in his presidential address refer to above has acknowledged this. This has been also indirectly acknowledged by the walkout of the Oriental bishops in 1984 when voting on the adaptation to the canons of the Latin code. Hence the CBCI before 1987 cannot be identified with the CBCI today. It is the CCBI that can claim continuity of the CBCI before 1987¹⁸.

Since this has not been properly understood by some of the Latin Bishops they seem to think of their membership in the CBCI in terms of its chronological priority and not in terms of ecclesial priority. They are bishops of the Latin Church and they owe their identity to this church. Hence, their allegiance and loyalty first and foremost is to the church of

18. Cf. *Report of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Hyderabad, January 4-13, 1976*, pp. 14-19. *Report of the General Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Nagpur, January 30-31 & February 6, 1984*.

their origin. As long as this is not understood, the dual membership of the Latin Bishops in two Episcopal Bodies will remain a constant challenge to the CCBI and to the Latin church in India.

Conclusion

It is said that the "Church has to renew itself always" (*Ecclesia est semper reformanda*). There is no ready-made Church. The Latin church in India even though heavily dependent upon the Latin church in the West and upon the bureaucratic set up of the Holy See, it cannot shun its duty of reforming herself according to the time and circumstances and thus become relevant to the present generation of the faithful. There is a need to constant renewal in the self-understanding of the church. The challenges mentioned above could be stimuli and occasion for this.

Nevertheless, "the affirmation of identity and autonomy of the local, individual Church should be situated within the vibrant dynamic communion of sharing in solidarity and resonance with all, in mutual love and respect, service and challenge among the various churches, promoting the reality of the universal Church, the fellowship of local, individual churches, the union of all peoples with God and among themselves in Christ."¹⁹

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19. D.S. Amalorpavados. "A Theology of Mission in India Today" in Kuncheria Pathil CMI.(ed) *Mission in India Today* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publicaitons, 1988), p. 339

The Tribal Churches in India: It's Identity and Challenges Today

Amrit Tirkey

The Latin Church spread throughout the vast stretch of the sub-continent that is India has enormous scope for diversity in cultures and traditions. A typical example is the Tribal Churches with all their characteristic features. Tribals are different from Aryans and the Semitic groups. Rev. Dr. Amrit Turkey S.J., who belongs to this group takes up the case of the Tribal Churches, such as Chotanagapur., their consolidation and expansion.

Introduction

Ranchi is a tribal populated Archdiocese. On the auspicious occasion of the Diocese's Platinum Jubilee (1927-2003), I would like to reflect on *The Tribal Churches in India: It's Identity and Challenges Today*. Social scientists designate a segment of the world's population as tribals, primitive or native tribes or aborigines. Such tribes or communities are found in all six continents. The tribals are, like any other defined human groups, a group of homogeneous people, having their own language, religion, way of life, socio-economic-political systems, etc. However, looking deeper into the matter, it will be obvious that tribals are quite different from non-tribals having different values, mentality, morality, socio-economic-political systems, etc. But not until as late as the 1950's, did the International Labour Organization (ILO) recognize them as being different from the dominant society of each country. These people are now described as "indigenous and tribal" in many official international documents.

The tribes are distinctly different from the Aryan and Semitic racial groups of the sub-continent. Tribes without any exception are different from the caste ridden dominant Hindu society in India. The tribal people's world view is different from the modern world view. For them, land is life. Forest and all trees, plants, and living beings are interrelated. They

form an organism with nature-spirit-human beings in our planet. The ecological or environmental problems are integrally related to the tribal people.

Culture and identity are intertwined concepts. Our identity is conditioned by our culture, that is, by our shared way of perceiving the world, our world-view. When tribal culture encounters Christianity a distinct tribal identity is reflected or should be reflected in the tribal Churches of India. In this article I shall confine myself with the major tribes of Chotanagpur¹ or the present new State of Jharkhand or more precisely with the tribal churches of Ranchi Archdiocese. I have adopted a method of historical survey of the tribal churches in Chotanagpur. I belong to Oraon tribe therefore, I am writing as an insider.

1. Tribes in India and Tribal Identity

India has the largest concentration of such indigenous and tribal people. As many as 400 tribes exist in India with a population of about 80 million (7 1/2% of India's total population of 900 million)². However, the Government of India is hesitant to accept the reality or even the concept of indigenous and tribal people in its territory. It is trying to avoid the socio-economic and political implications and responsibilities towards this section of the population as defined by world organizations.

Tribes of India have been extensively studied by social scientists, administrators and missionaries from the 19th and 20th centuries. There is a general agreement among scholars that tribes in India can be classified under three major racial and linguistic groups³. The tribes are spread all over the country in the mountainous and hilly land and plateau regions of India. We can group the tribals under six major regional communities in India.

1. The North East India- Arunachal, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, and Assam.

2. The North Central Regions (Jharkhand)- Bihar, W. Bengal, Northern Orissa, Eastern Madhya Pradesh

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1. Chotanagpur, comprising the old District of Ranchi, Lohardaga, Gumla, Palamau, Hazaribagh. Giridih,, Singbhum and Dhandad in Jharkhand and the whole District of Santhal Parganas are well known for their high percentage of tribal population. The major tribal communities are the Mundas, the Oraons, the Kharias, the Hos and the Santhals.
 2. Nirmal Minj, *Rise Up, My People, And Claim The Promise: The Gospel Among the Tribes of India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1997), p. xiii.
 3. Nirmal Minj, "Identity of Tribals in India, " pp. 24-25. Major linguistic and cultural groups- Austric, Dravidian and Mongoloid.

3. Western India- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Western M.P., Northern Maharashtra

4. North Western India- Himachal Pradesh, some portion of Jammu & Kashmir valley.

5. South Eastern Regions- Southern Orissa, Northern Andhra, Southern M.O., and Eastern Maharashtra

6. Southern India-Western Ghats and the Nilgiri hills in Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka

Characteristic Features of the Tribals

To get a clear perspective of tribal churches it is essential to grasp the basic characteristics of tribal society.

Tribals are *nature-loving* people. It is perhaps to show their solidarity with nature that they build their hamlets close to or in the very midst of forests and mountains. So also tribals enjoy roaming about and hunting in the forests, fishing in the rivers, collecting food and other household materials from the forest. They *own everything in common* without the attitude of hoarding, monopolizing, accumulating or calculating in view of the future. In simple words it can be said that tribals follow the system of need fulfillment and not greed fulfillment which in other words would also mean hand to mouth system or living on God's Providence.

Tribals are *communitarian* people. They live in villages as well-knit communities. As well-knit communities, tribals live together, work together, rejoice together and also suffer together. In other words there is no individualism among tribals. The law-breakers are punished by their village communities and the one who does not abide by the norms of the community is left alone by all - no association nor dealing with such person.

Tribals are *egalitarian* people. They consider everybody and every human group (tribe) as equal. This means there is no high or low status or caste system among the tribals. They follow the direct democratic system. They propose and elect their officials directly by a simple majority consensus. However, in this tribal democratic system, the power of taking decision is not given to the elected officials, decisions are taken by the community, but always in the presence of the elected officials. The real job of the elected officials consists in calling and facilitating village meetings, examining the decisions taken by the community and finally implementing them. Thus there remains mutual check and balance. there exists no possibility of being bribed or being dictated.

Tribals are *action-oriented* people. They express their sentiments, feelings and beliefs through action and not through words. They are freedom-loving people. They want to be the masters of their own life-working or relaxing according to their own needs and wishes.

For the tribals, space is primary and time is secondary in their thinking. Land is life for the tribes of India. Ancestors are part of our social concept. Relations with all human beings, natural objects and spirits around us constitute reality for the tribal mind. We exist because we have a relationship with others and not because we think.

2. Tribals of Chotanagpur:

Their Encounter with Christianity

The first Christian Missionaries came to Chotanagpur in the middle of the 19th century when the suppression, oppression and exploitation of the tribals by the landlords and other interlopers who had entrenched themselves in the entire region were going on unabated. The missionaries from the German Evangelical Mission were the first to come to Chotanagpur. These missionaries were members of the Missionary Society, founded by John Baptist Gossner, in 1836⁴. Four German Missionaries- Emil Schatz, Theodore Janke, August Brandt and Friedrich Batsch- sent by Father Johannes Evangelista Gossner arrived in Ranchi on November 2, 1845⁵. They began to preach and distribute pamphlets, spreading the good news of the Gospel in the Hindi Language. They laid foundation stone of the German Lutheran Evangelical Mission on December 1, 1845, between Ranchi and Doranda. Four Oraons- Doman Pahan, Kesho, Bandhu and Ghuran- became seekers and after having had a vision of Jesus they were baptized on June 9, 1850. After their baptism they went on telling about Jesus to their relatives and friends. They were followed by the Anglican and Catholic Missionaries in 1869.

The early history of the Catholic Church in Chotanagpur region is related to the history of the Jesuits Mission in Bengal, which belonged to the Jesuits of the English Province until the year 1846. On November 28, 1859, the first four Belgian Jesuits arrived in Calcutta. In 1864 the Vicariate Apostolic of Calcutta was formally made over to the Belgian Jesuits Province. The first Belgian Jesuit to enter

4. See L. Clarysse, *Father Constant Lievens*. (Ranchi: Satya Bharati, 1984), pp. 109-124.

5. See Tete Peter, *A Short History of the Expansion of the Catholic Missions in North India* (Ranchi: St Albert's College, 1997), pp. 289-291.

Chotanagpur was Fr. Auguste Stockman. He traveled by bullock cart from Midnapur and after a difficult journey of a fortnight reached Chaibasa on July 10, 1869⁶. The future of missionary work at Chaibasa looked grim. On November 8, 1873, Msgr Steins himself baptized 24 adults and 4 children⁷. These were the first tribal Catholics of Chotanagpur. Fr Stockman moved towards Ranchi district in January in 1875. Other Belgian Jesuits came to Ranchi in 1877 to act as military chaplains to the troops at Doranda (Ranchi). However, the real impetus came from Fr. Constant Lievens 1856-1893), who arrived at Doranda in March 1885. He is called the apostle of Chotanagpur⁸. He arrived at Doranda on March 18, 1885, and next morning proceeded to Jamgain, where he'd get initiated into the work over the next few months. After spending a little more than four months there he went to Torpa and started setting there on November 23, 1885. On October 16, 1889, Father Lievens set off on horseback for Barway to begin his conversion movement among the Oraons. On May 4, 1901, Fathers Cardon and Joseph Van Gerven set out to do pioneering work in Biru.

3. Consolidation and Expansion of Tribal Churches

In 1870, Fr Stockman invited the Holy Cross Sisters from Calcutta to take care of the womenfolk of his parish. In 1890, the Loreto Sisters from Ireland opened a convent in Purulia Road, Ranchi. They ran an elementary school from which four girls were admitted as postulants by the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto in 1897. Four years later these four postulants became the first novices of the flourishing Congregation of the Daughters of St Anne, canonically erected in 1903. The Ursuline Sisters of Tildonk, Belgium also established themselves in the same compound in 1903.

By 1927 the Ranchi Mission had developed to such an extent that by a decree of the Holy See, dated May 25, 1927, it was separated from the Calcutta Archdiocese to form a new Diocese with Ranchi as its Episcopal seat and Msgr. Louis Van Hoeck as the first Bishop. He was succeeded by Rt. Rev. Oscar Sevrin, S.J., in 1934, who was pastor for 18 years (1934-52). Bishop Sevrin's Episcopal reign witnessed consolidation and spread of the Catholic Church.

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6. Peter Tete. *A Short History of the Expansion of the Catholic Missions in North India*, p. 316.
 7. Fedelis de Sa, *Crisis in Chota Nagpur*. Bangalore, 1975, p. 118.
 8. See L. Clarysse, *Father Constant Lievens*, pp. 125-139. James Aril, *The Missionary Approach of Fr. Lievens* (Ranchi: Catholic Press, 2001). There are a number of books available, both in Hindu and English, on Father Constant Lievens, S.J.

It may be of interest to show how unabated has been the growth of the Catholic population by the number of new parishes established from 1901 until 1935: 1901: Rengarish, Tongo and Soso; 1903: Kurdeg, Samtoli; 1908: Majhatoli, Kesramal and Noadih; 1915: Ginabahar; 1918: Gholeng; 1919: Hamirpur; 1920: Bemeral; 1923: Ambakona, Musgutri, Tapkara, Gaibira; 1924: Lachragarh, Jhummur; 1927: Gangutoli, Dumbarnat; 1930: Hazaribag; 1931: Lohardaga, Chaibasa; 1935: Banbira, Anandpur, Chandwa⁹.

Soon the rapid growth of the mission made it imperative to call in other labourers, the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) Fathers, the Australian and the American Jesuits.

For the better pastoral care of the faithful, the vast Archdiocese of Ranchi was divided and in June 14, 1951, the Diocese of Sambalpur and on December 13, 1951, the Diocese of Raigarh-Ambikapur were created. In 1952, the Diocese of Ranchi was raised to the status of an Archdiocese with Most Rev Nicholas Kujur, S.J. as its first tribal Bishop of the diocese with a flock of 2,54,330 sheep. On July 2, 1962, the Diocese of Jamshedpur was created. Then in 1968, the Dioceses of Patna and Bhagalpur and the Prefecture of Balasore were made suffragans of Ranchi Archdiocese. Again in 1971, the Diocese of Daltonganj, comprising the civil districts of Hazaribag and Palamau was carved out of the Archdiocese of Ranchi. In 1980, Muzaffarpur Diocese was formed from a part of Patna Diocese and made suffragan to Ranchi.

The 350 Andamans and Nicobar Islands which were formerly part of Ranchi Archdiocese under the care of the Pilar Fathers, became a new Diocese on June 22, 1984. On July 1, 1993, two new Dioceses, Gumla and Simdega, were established with territories taken from the Ranchi Archdiocese. Rev. Fr. Michael Minj, S.J. and Rev. Fr. Joseph Minj were appointed as the first Bishops of Gumla and Simdega respectively. On May 12, 1995 the new Diocese of Khunti was established. In the same year Hazaribag became a separate Diocese. Thus the original Ranchi Mission has by now given birth to 11 Dioceses including the present Archdiocese of Ranchi.

Conversions in the Chotanagpur region continue, but they are not as numerous as in the early years of the Mission. There are about 7,764,000 Catholics in this region (the old Ranchi Mission). In the Diocese of Ranchi alone figures rose to 236,073 in 1961 and to 2,778,555 in 1967. At present there are 147,191 Catholics in the Archdiocese of Ranchi, scattered over an area of 9,064 sq. kms¹⁰.

9. P. Ponette, "The Ranchi Mission," pp. 32-33.

10 See Peter Tete, ed. *Constant Lievens and The Catholic Church in Chotanagpur*; p. 19.

Education

The Catholic Church has given much importance to education in order to raise the intellectual level of both the Catholics and non-Catholics alike¹¹. Education in the tribal communities through educational institutions has had a remarkable impact in the life of the tribal communities in Chotanagpur. Schools and colleges have become among the greatest service agencies to the tribes of India. Before the division the Archdiocese of Ranchi alone had 363 primary schools, 159 middle schools, 88 high schools, 4 colleges and 6 institutions of college level. Thanks to education also tribal people are no longer reduced to functioning as 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' but contribute their best to the nation as soldiers, officers, teachers, clerical personnel, industrial workers, ISA officers, doctors, engineers. The difference in progress between tribes which have taken up education and those which till now have not, or have done so only lately, is so clear that it needs no further proof. Vocational education like carpentry, tailoring, sewing, embroidery and other trades were taught to the youth of the communities along with the Gospel.

Health Care

The tribes on the Chotanagpur Plateau have their own pharmacopoeia. Every householder has some idea of the curative power of the drugs obtainable from root, bark and leaf. In more difficult cases, this householder may call upon the services of the village Baid, or herbalist, who is adept in making a correct diagnosis and prescribing the right medicament from out that tribal pharmacopoeia.

Into such a milieu of sickness and cure came our first missionaries with their medicine chests of Aspirin and Atebrin, of Quinine and Iodine. This was the first stage of curative medicine till dispensaries opened in the more important centers, dispensaries staffed by trained Sisters and Nurses. Rev. Archbishop Sevrin invited the Medical Missionary Sisters to open a hospital in Mandar. During his episcopate, smaller hospital and dispensaries came up in most established parishes. The dispensaries are still functioning and now number 44 throughout the Archdiocese. In 1978 was launched the Ranchi Archdiocese Health Service. Five Sisters of three different Congregations teamed up to bring medical aid to the remotest villages where there is much need of it. Health education through health centers and hospitals became the major medium of

11. See S. Kachhap, *Contribution of Christian Missions to the Cause of Education in Chotanagpur 1845-1945* (Ranchi: Ranchi University, 2001).

showing the love of Christ to the tribes. Mission hospitals and health clinics have given the communication of the Gospel a new impetus. The love of Jesus Christ was shared in caring for the sick and suffering rather than in just preaching this love to the people.

Associations

A large number of sabhas (Associations) were formed in the various parishes. The All Chotanagpur Catholic Sabha was established on the 5th February, 1932. It primarily aimed to find out ways and means to avoid hindrances on the part of the non-Christians in the spread of education among the Roman Catholics, to stop forced labour, to stop drinking and land agitations and finally to enlighten the Mothers and Children to lead an ideal Catholic life.

The Ranchi Roman Catholic Youths were organized by the Rev. Fr. E. De Meulder, S.J. from the 8th May, 1938 onwards by holding sports, and a census of the Roman Catholics was completed in the same year. The Chotanagpur Roman Catholic Mahila Sangh was established on 10th October, 1938 in order to organize the Roman Catholic Mothers. Marian Sodalities and other pious associations received a new lease of life. Further organizations, such as the Maria Marg, YCS, Krus Vir, AICUF, CLC and other organizations give witness in Christian life and values.

The tribal Catholics, poor and illiterate as they were, were being exploited by moneyed and unscrupulous "outsiders". The missionaries were ready to help the tribals by giving them alms and loans in their just struggles against their oppressors. Therefore J.B. Hoffmann and the missionaries tried to relieve them from their abject poverty by putting pressure on the British Administration to introduce land laws, such as the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 and by opening the Chota Nagpur Catholic Mission Co-operative Credit Society on December 2, 1909 and the Chota Nagpur Co-operative Stores in 1913. The Catholic Co-operative Credit Society met with tremendous success.

Seminary

The Pope Leo XIII and the propaganda insisted on the formation of an indigenous clergy. And that is how the Apostolic School was started as early as 1902. St Albert's College which was started in Ranchi in December 1913, trains future priests not only for this Archdiocese, but also for 28 other dioceses and five Congregations in North India. By a decree of the sacred Congregation for Catholic Education of August 15, 1982, St Albert's College was raised to the status of a Faculty of Theology which enables the students to obtain the licentiate in sacred sciences.

Regional Theology Centre, Tarunoday was started on June 30, 1983 to serve the Jesuit provinces of the Tribal belt. The center conducts the first two years of theological formation with B.Th. Comprehensive examination in the fourth year. The third year is taken care of by the National Centre Vidyajyoti, Delhi.

Publications

In order to promote the values of the Kingdom of God: peace, justice, love, reconciliation, brotherhood and service the local Church uses Christian literature as a means. Through it the Church has been able to diffuse Christian life and worship through the publications of *Life and Worship*, *Nishkalanka*, *Sevartham*, *Tarang Bharti* and others. There have been translations of the Holy Bible by the late Father Camille Bulcke.

People with primal religions have been comparatively more open to the Gospel than those of other religions.

4. Why did some Tribes Embrace Christianity?¹²

We can only venture a few points here. Christian thinking in general accepted the presence of British colonial power as providential for the preaching of the Gospel.

1. Where the message went across, and reached its conclusion in the form of a positive response, it was thanks to the fact that it was *addressed to the community-gathered-in-panchayat*, or to whole families rather than to individuals. Knowingly or unknowingly, Christian missionaries hit on the right approach: they approached tribal society *as a society*.
2. Why the people responded positively is due to the fact that they found so much *similarity* between the second announcement of God's Word and the original announcement, revealed to them through the Spirit pervading nature. They saw a continuity between the announcement in the Second Testament and their own First testament.
3. A third reason why communication 'went across' is that missionaries addressed themselves to people-community with their *social* and *economic* needs. They encountered the people when they were in extreme distress, caught in the middle of an agrarian crisis, which was robbing them of their land. When some missionaries took up the defense of these agrarian rights in the courts of law and succeeded, then did the people recognize God's message and were they ready to come over.

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12. Michael Van Den Bogaert, "Communication, Community and Tribals." Pp. 48-50.

One has spoken of "rice Christians". This is a highly simplistic, unfair and inadequate concept to understand what happened, and is deeply resented by tribal groups who did embrace Christianity. As though they were not intelligent enough to know very well what they were doing. The phrase 'rice Christians' expresses a tendency to impute a purely materialist motivation to religious conversions or any efforts at seeking religious mobility. It is disparaging to call 'rice Christians' those who have sought a religious identity in the Church while seeking the fulfillment of their basic needs. For the poor perceive the fulfillment of basic needs as 'salvation', whether it is food, self-respect, freedom from social discrimination, educational opportunities, etc. It is demeaning also to give this title to the present generation, Children of parents who supposedly were 'rice Christians'. It is a paradox that those who are more emancipated, the so-called social elite of these communities accuse their fellow Christians of being 'rice-Christians'. They consider themselves to be pure and unalloyed Christians, while many of them seek even greater social mobility. Even in the case of those converted years ago, educational opportunities seem to be an important motivation for remaining in the Church or for getting their children baptized.

4. The missionaries addressed the message in a cultural setting and a language which the people understood, and which linked the Christian message with what God had revealed to them in the original revelation. Missionaries were often the first to learn tribal languages, put them in writing, translated the Bible, wrote grammars, dictionaries.

The tribes were more open to the Gospel have to do with their world view. The relationship between the material, social and spiritual worlds is one of the key principles in the tribal world view. The natural, the human and the supernatural are integrally intertwined with each other. There is a nature-man-spirit continuum in tribal experience and thought. Their belief in ancestral spirits as being part of the human society, and their observances of totems are keys to their self-understanding.

5. Challenges to Tribal Churches

Religious

The tribal churches are 100-150 year old. Among the 3rd and 4th generation members, the excitement of the first generation converts slowly began to subside. A normal and routine life under the patronage and guidance of the parent body abroad became the general trend of development in these churches. Christian education and nurture in the Church become so neglected that children, youth, and adults begin to

grow in an atmosphere of indifference to the deeper demands of faith. They live contentedly with the ritual, practice, and constitutional requirements of the organized denominational church. Biblical illiteracy begins to be widespread in the Church. The majority of members turn out to be nominal Christians. They remain members of the Church for the sake of convenience rather than out of a conviction that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Saviour.

Churches in the denominational bodies among the tribes are divided. These divisions go deep into the very basis of the church. A fragmented church cannot adequately train its leaders. A fragmented church cannot show love through healing and development of ministries. A fragmented church cannot bear testimony to the reconciling love of God that it preaches. Unity of the churches among the tribes and of all other churches at a local, regional and national level is imperative if the church is to be relevant to their context. How awkward one feels when churches in the same tribe, or churches among tribes in the local and regional communities differ fundamentally and are unable to cooperate in witness and service in the same frontier situation. This unity is one of the basic requirements for the task to be undertaken and the goal to be reached in leavening the Indian life.

The Hindutva philosophy and the Hindu nationalism is an attempt at creating a collective identity for Indians. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharthiya Janata Party (BJP) are inculcating the idea that the tribals are Hindus. They are using the institutions of schools and welfare programmes to disseminate these ideas and to establish their intellectual and moral superiority. They always try to create division between Christian and non-Christian tribals. In the urban areas there occurs a break-up of the tribal population and with the influx of the non-tribal population "sanskritization" of the areas and in consequence communal disharmony is ever on the increase. There has been a penetration by Hindu fundamentalism into social, political, economic and religious life of the area. Fundamentalists are spreading reports and trying to instill in the minds of the people that the tribals are Hindus.

Political

The *Unnati Samaj* (Development Society) had been started by the Protestants. The Catholics, too, were members of this Samaj. In 1939 under Jaipal Singh (a non-Catholic), the *Adibasi Mahasabha* was formed with an object of creating a separate State of Jharkhand. This non-denominational political party was supported by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. The Jharkhand Party was founded in 1950 as the political wing of the *Adibasi Mahasabha*. With the aim of attracting people of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas into a wide political organization.

During the post-independent election 1952 the Party did quite well. But the decline set in from 1962 onward. When it posed a threat to the Congress party in Chotanagpur, divisive elements entered the Jharkhand Party and in September 1963 it merged into the ruling Congress. This caused the formation of a new Jharkhand Party under the leadership of N.E. Horo. Its leaders did not have any agrarian programme and failed to meet challenges posed by industrial growth in the area. From 1963 onward there occurred serious divisions in the party. There also occurred serious divisions between the tribal Christians and tribal non-Christians. The Jharkhand party was divided into many groups. It is sad to say that in the political arena the tribal Catholics lack leadership.

Educational

The Catholic Church in Chotanagpur takes pride for its valuable contribution in the area of education. However, the present system of education is not able to help the tribals to cope with the rapidly changing socio-economic situations around them. It has created a middle class and an elitist attitude has developed among the few who have had the chance to go to schools and colleges. The gap between the old and new pattern of ethical life has led many to adopt criminal way of life. Schools and colleges are instruments destroying self-respect and tribal identity. Education today makes the tribal youth unfit for their own village life and cannot give adequate skill to adapt themselves to the changing social life around them. The present system of education teaches for cut-throat-competition where as the tribal ethos is against competition. The educated middle class Catholic tribals who live in cities are becoming more and more individualistic. This group of people come to the Church on Sundays and return home without having any significant interaction with their less fortunate co-tribals.

Economic

The economic condition of the tribal villages is still poor. The tribals are migrating to cities or to other parts of India in search of livelihood. The industrialization of Jharkhand has changed the character of Chotanagpur, and Ranchi city, once a town with a tribal majority, now finds in a small minority. The decline of the tribal population in urban areas of Chotanagpur is because of the lower employment opportunities for tribals in growing towns and cities. In the past the Church in Chotanagpur stood by her sons and daughters in social and economic vicissitudes as their guide and defender. Now the Catholic Church has been for the most part unable to grapple with the problems of rapid urbanization. The education imparted by Catholic institutions does not prepare youth to meet the challenges of industrialization. Hence in the industrial and administrative sectors employment opportunities have been by and large parcelled out among the non-tribals.

Cultural

During the initial years embracing Christianity involved a break with the past. Dancing, the use of drums, the consumption of spirited drinks, the old myths and sacrifices were frowned upon as being devilish. Missionaries did not understand the importance of certain tribal rules with regard to eating, marriage within the tribe etc., with the result that in certain cases Christian converts lost their tribal status and were looked down upon as a caste apart.

Christians have been accused- and rightly so- of contributing to the detribalization of society. Formal education has for a long time neglected the teaching of tribal languages and literature. The same education has promoted middle class values, which equip persons and families to cope with modern life and formal employment, but have brought along an erosion of traditional tribal values.

In all humility and truthfulness one has to admit that embracing Christianity has not been an unmixed blessing. It has brought about a split in the community between those who profess the traditional religion and those who have embraced Christianity, and amongst the latter a further splitting into various denominations. The weakening effect on tribal society, as expressed for instance in the erosion of authority of the original panchayat, is a loss we Christians do not sufficiently appreciate.

Soon after the Second Vatican Council the Bishops of India during their meeting in 1966 pledged their wholehearted support for renewal in Sacred Liturgy and in particular for liturgical adaptation. In 1971 when the CBCI held its biennial General Body Meeting at Ranchi the prelates were very much impressed by the sweet tribal hymns and graceful offertory dances o the accompaniment of drums and flutes. Under this powerful impact of the local Church, the CBCI decided to leave the matter of inculturation in the liturgy to the Regional Bishops' Councils. Since then the Church in Chotanagpur has been trying to express the teaching of Christ and the one Faith in the tongue, style and culture of the tribal people.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Chotanagpur has been firmly established among the tribals. The Church is identified as a tribal one and she is living her Faith in her own cultural milieu. More than a hundred years ago the missionaries courageously stood by the tribals in the face of exploitation social, political and economic and through their ministrations the tribals are now incorporated in the family of God's people. There is a great hope in the tribal Church. Numbers of tribal boys and girls are going out to serve God's people everywhere in the world.

The universal character of the church has to be maintained through observing Christian traditions and fellowship in Jesus Christ. This does

not in any way mean that we should lose our identity as tribal Christians. Rather, we are called upon to bring our tribal world view to bear upon our theological research and writings. The tribal Churches must work on the basis of the tribal people's world view which is quite similar to the world. Peace with justice and the integrity of creation can be better understood within the tribal world view and one can work towards establishing an egalitarian society with peace and justice, in a world view concerning our relationships with one another.

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The Malankara Catholic Church: Problems and Prospects

Philip Chembakassery

The Malankara Catholic Church is one of the three individual Catholic Churches in Kerala with its own liturgical tradition called Antiochene. In the 17th century there occurred a division among the St. Thomas Christians on account of a conflict with the Portuguese and some of the Thomas Christians vowed they would never have any truck with them (A.D. 1653). They eventually shifted away from the main stream and were called Jacobites. A group of Jacobites of Kerala reunited with the Catholic Church in 1930, and they are the forerunners of the present Malankara Catholic Church. The author of this article, Rev. Dr. Philip Chembakassery, a member of this Church, traces the history of the Church, its growth and development, its identity as well as the problems and challenges it has to face.

The Malankara Catholic Church is a small Christian community in full communion with Rome, a community that follows the ancient Syro-Antiochene liturgy and practices. It was in 1930 that this Church came into full communion with Rome. It was the result of the great ecumenical endeavors of the late Mar Ivanios who was a bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Church. This Church has a history of speedy growth in the number of the faithful, educational institutions and substantial contributions in other areas of social and spiritual ministry. But this growth has also brought with it certain problems of an ecclesial and social nature. This article is an attempt to highlight the ecclesiality of this Church with the recent problems, which it faces.

I. The Church of St. Thomas

The Malankara Catholic Church traces its origin to the apostolic ministry of St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. The Indian Church of St. Thomas, which was practically confined to the Travancore-Cochin area, now part of the state of Kerala, was an independent Church,

which developed according to the traditions and culture of this land. In liturgy this Church followed the practices of the ancient Persian Church. But in Church organization, administration, festal celebrations, celebrations in connection with matrimony, relationship with non-Christians etc, this Church was following the customs and traditions of this land, which was predominantly Hindu. The historical evidences referring to the first thirteen centuries of its existence, show that this Church was in direct spiritual and hierarchical bond with the Persian Church and that it received bishops from this Church, though the priests were indigenous and the administration predominantly democratic.

The Dissension and Division

With the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries by the end of the fifteenth century, there was the beginning of trouble in this Church. The main problem was one of ignorance on the part of the Portuguese who were not used to any form of Christian liturgical practices other than the Roman. They found this Church of St. Thomas the Apostle as a schismatic and heretical Church. The Persian liturgy used by the Kerala Christians was the same as the one used by the Nestorian Church. But the faith of the Kerala Church was always orthodox and the Church was always in communion with Rome in ways that were possible for a Church in the ancient world¹. But the sameness of liturgy gave the impression that this Church was Nestorian in faith and so heretical. The Portuguese missionaries started a purification of this Church with the intention of making it Catholic, which it already was. The method they followed was to change the liturgy and introduce the Roman liturgy in Syriac translation. But it was both unnecessary and impractical. It was unnecessary because the Church of St. Thomas was Catholic in its faith. It was impractical because this Church having lived some fifteen centuries against all vicissitudes of history had made this liturgy and practice part and parcel of its life, so much so that to part company with this age-old practice was understood to be suicidal. Yet the Portuguese missionaries got the upper hand over the people of the land and many changes were slowly introduced to the extent that by the seventeenth century, this Church of St. Thomas was nothing but a colony of the Portuguese Church with almost all Portuguese practices except the language of Syriac in liturgy. The situation was so vulnerable that the

1. For further information about the autonomy this Church enjoyed till the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries cf. S. Vadakel, "The Autonomy of the Thomas Christian Church of India up to the Sixteenth Century" *Christian Orient*, vol., 8 (1992, non.1. PP 30-35.

St. Thomas Christians by a solemn oath taken in 1653, known as the Coonan Cross Oath, declared themselves free from the ecclesial domination of the Portuguese². In all appearances this event may seem to be a schismatic movement, making the Church independent of the Roman leadership. But the fact is that the Christians who made the solemn oath had no intention of defection from Rome. It was a protest against the Jesuit missionaries who were holding the spiritual leadership of the Kerala Church with their Latinizing of the St. Thomas Christians³. The formula used for the oath is a clear evidence for the non-schismatic nature of the movement. In the oath they said that they would not any more be subject to "the St. Paul Fathers" i.e. the Jesuits who were the ruling bishops of the Kerala Church. The people had no intention of breaking away from Rome. This is clear from the fact that when Rome intervened by sending a bishop favourable to the St. Thomas Christians, the vast majority of the people stood with Rome. In fact the division created by the oath was complete. All the people were represented in the oath. It was as a Church that the St. Thomas Christians protested against the Jesuits. All the people were united in this protest. In a sense the Coonan Cross oath was a test case, an occasion to prove the unity of the people. The test clearly showed that they were firmly united on the basis of their Syriac heritage, Indian patrimony and the apostolic tradition.

But the policy of Rome was the policy of divide and rule. The new bishops who were sent to win back the St. Thomas Christians only divided them into two groups, one supporting the bishops and the other opposing them, which finally ended up in the complete separation of the opposing group from the Church of Rome. After the Coonan Cross oath, the Thomas Christians elected a bishop for themselves from among their priests and he was called Mar Thomas I. Rome intervened by sending bishop Sebastiani a Carmelite missionary. But instead of seeing the defected Christians as one Church, he tried to divide the St. Thomas Christians and win the support of one group against the other. When the political situation in Kerala was unfavorable, he consecrated one Chandy Parambil as his successor for the group that supported him. It was a very unwise action and it only widened the drift between the supporters and non supporters. If on the other hand he had taken a course of

2. Cf. X. Koodapuzha, *Bharata Sabha Charitram*, Kottayam, 1980, p. 322.

3. Cf. G. Chediath, "Anomalous situation in the Indian Church" *Freedom Fighters of Thomas Christians*, (ed) T. Vellilamthadam and J. Kurianal. Kottayam, 1986, p. 77

reconciliation and validly consecrated the bishop of the St. Thomas Christians' choice, namely, Mar Thomas I, there would not have been a St. Thomas Christian community in Kerala opposing the Roman leadership⁴. The opposing party sought ecclesial leadership from ancient non-Roman Churches with Syriac heritage. Finally they found their saviour in the Jacobite Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, who sent bishops to look after the pastoral needs of the separated group. Though this Church also was using Syriac in their liturgy, the Syriac of this Church was not the Syriac of the St. Thomas Christians. The St. Thomas Christians were from the earliest known time using the East Syriac, while the Syriac of the Jacobite Syrian Church was the West Syriac, a langue that had received many influences from the Greek language, like the vowels, many theological terms etc. In fact the wooing of the Antiochene Church was the result of ignorance on the part of the Kerala Christians and a sort of deception from the part of the Antiochene Church. History tells us that the bishops sent by the Jacobite Patriarch wisely exploited the attachment of the Kerala Christians to their liturgy so much so that they allowed all the old forms of liturgy to be continued undisturbed, though the liturgy of the Jacobite Church was entirely different from it. It was in the Mavelikara Synod, which was held in 1818 that the Antiochene liturgy was officially introduced into the community of the separated brethren⁵. Other documents show that even after this synod the old form of liturgy in Eastern Syriac was in use in certain places. With the ecclesial leadership from Antioch and the slow introduction of the West Syrian Liturgy this faction established itself as an independent schismatic Church and was known as the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church. No documents pertaining to the pre-Coonan cross period has any reference to the Church of this land as the Jacobite Church. But the present policy of many Indian communities seems to be creating their own community history by distorting the real history. This is what we understand from the books put forward as history by the leaders of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church. Later this community was known as the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Now this people who broke away from Catholic communion exist in five independent Churches, or Christian Communities- The Thozhiyoor Church of Malabar which has a strength of a few thousand people, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church which has a membership running over seven lakhs, the St. Thomas Evangelical Church with a few thousand believers, the Malankara

4. Cf. V. Vithayathil, " Attempts made by the Thomas Christians to get Bishops of their own Rite", *Christian Orient*, Vol. 2 (1981), no. 1, pp 29-45.

5. X. Koodapuzha, *Bharata Sabha Charitram*, op. cit. p. 580-81.

Jacobite Syrian Church which keeps full communion with the Jacobite Syrian Patriarch of Antioch. This is the most popular of all the factions with some 10 lakhs or more membership and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church with the Catholicos of Kottayam as its head. This faction has almost the same number of faithful as the Jacobite Syrian Church. Then there is the Malankara Catholic Church which originated from the Orthodox Syrian Church. A section of the Schismatic group of St. Thomas Christians has been absorbed into some other Christian communities like the Church of South India, not to mention the Pentecostal communities of Kerala, which consists mostly of the defected Christians of St. Thomas the Apostle.

The Malankara Catholic Church and Reunion

As said above, the defected St. Thomas Christians have been scattered into many Christian communities. The first division with a few thousands breaking away as the Thozhiyoor Church in 1772, the second one occurred in 1843 with the formation of the Malankara Mar Thoma Church which consists of the defected St. Thomas Christians and the third division occurred with the split in the Church into those who support the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and those who do not support. The supporters of the Patriarch are the Jacobite Syrians and those who do not support are the Orthodox Syrians. The split was started in 1909 and reached its climax in 1913 with the arrival of Patriarchs Abdulla and Abdad Mishihah from the Antiochene Church. The pioneers of the Malankara Catholic Church came from the Malankara Orthodox faction. It was on 20 September 1930. The immediate context was the failure in reconciling the two warring groups. It was Mar Ivanios, a bishop of the Malankara Orthodox Church, who took the leadership in bringing the Malankara Syrian Church, the group that broke away from Rome after the Coonan Cross oath and subsequent events. The philosophy behind this move was that the Church of St Thomas should return to the same relationship of communion, which it had before the Conan Cross Oath. He knew that after many years of the use of the Syro-Antiochene Rite and practices in the Church and after the new Rite has become part and parcel of the life style of the people it was not possible to abandon that Rite and go back to the pre-Coonan Cross Rite. More over there was no need. The fact is that those who abandoned the East Syrian Rite for the Jacobite West Syrian Rite felt more at home with this Liturgy than the one they had been using earlier. The Liturgy was most solemn and it had a great variety and was based on a profound theology and a sense of the mystery aspect of God. It was very difficult for the people who were used to this liturgy to leave it and opt for another.

Mar Ivanios was an extraordinarily great personality with deep experience of God, vast knowledge of the history of Christianity in India, especially of the Christianity hailing from the apostolic preaching of St. Thomas, a profound social sense which saw the deep recesses of the social fabric of Kerala and a clear vision for the future of Christianity. His effort was in view of a total ecclesial communion with Rome involving the Malankara Syrian Community in its totality. But the historical upheavals of the time and the social thinking of the people were such that a movement started with the consent and cooperation of all the hierarchy and the educated clergy and laity was later reduced into a movement of a small minority within the Church. It was the Orthodox hierarchy that entrusted Mar Ivanios with the work of starting letter correspondence with Rome. It was in the name of the Church as such and not in his personal name that he contacted Rome in regard to full communion with it. But when the favourable answer came from Rome, it was too late and many of the high-ranking Church personnel had already changed their attitude. Only Mar Ivanios, the leader of the movement, Mar Theophilos another bishop of the same Church and a few others persisted in the move and entered into full communion with Rome in 1930. Since it is a movement started in the St. Thomas Christian community which was from all antiquity in full communion with Rome and a movement to bring this people back to what they lost through the faction, this movement is known as the re-union movement, a movement for the rapprochement of the Church of St. Thomas with Rome. With this event a new individual Church was added to the Catholic Communion. Though only a handful of people joined the movement in its inception, the reaction of the people in later years was most encouraging. Many people from different sections of the Kerala Christian population joined the Church, people from both the factions of the Malankara Syrian Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Thozhiyoor Church, the CSI, different communities of the Pentecostals and so on. The names of bishop Mar Severios, Mar Dioscoros and Mar Philexinos deserve special mention. Mar Severios came from the Orthodox Church; Mar Dioscoros came from the Jacobite side. Mar Philexinos was a bishop of the Thozhiyoor Church. With them many thousands of people both clergy in high standing in the Christian community and social life and learned lay men and women who had done eminent service to the social life of Kerala also joined the Church.

The functioning of the Church is through a two level apostolate. On the one hand the Church spreads the message of ecumenism attracting Christian individuals and groups into full communion with Rome through membership in the Malankara Catholic Church. On the other hand, the

Church makes use of all its available sources to preach the Good News to non-Christians. The result was most propitious. Today this Church is a metropolitan Church *sui iuris* with a population of five lacks living in the five dioceses. This growth is most stupendous when compared with the fact that the Church is only 73 years in its existence as a Catholic Church in communion with Rome.

II. All is Not Well

In spite of the fast growing membership of the Church, its self-assertion in the social life of the country, the great contribution it has made in the field of education and many other similar services the Church is rendering to the Indian society, the Malankara Catholic Church is facing problems of a serious nature from diverse corners and quarters. Unless care is taken to resolve these problems, the Church will find itself in a suicidal situation.

1. The Right to Fulfill the Pastoral and Evangelical Obligation

When the Malankara Catholic Church was born with the reunion of Mar Ivanios, the understanding was that an Apostolic Church, which, due to historical reasons had been severed from Rome, was re-entering into communion with the Roman Church. It was as a Church that Mar Ivanios and others were received into the Church and not as a few individuals. From the very inception of the process of reunion, the idea was that an Apostolic Church, the Church of St. Thomas was shaking hands with another Apostolic Church, the Roman Church of St. Peter⁶. The Council of Vatican II has clearly stated that the Catholic Church is not the Roman Church as such but it is the communion of Churches. No Church can claim to be Catholic if it rejects communion with other churches or hinders other Churches to come into communion. The Council says, "That Church, Holy and Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by hierarchy, form separate Churches or rites"⁷.

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6. About the individuality of the Malankara Catholic Church and the fact that the reunion movement is to be understood as one individual church entering into communion with another individual Church and not as a few Christian getting absorbed into the Latin church, cf. Mar Baselios, "The Reunion Movement: Its Goals and Significance", *Christian Orient*, vol. 2 (1981), no. 2, PP 186-190.
 7. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 2, as given in *The Documents of Vatican II* (ed) W.M. Abbott, New York, 1966, p. 347.

That the St. Thomas Christians were an apostolic Church is a fact no one can deny. In fact the Latin or Roman Rite missionaries who tried to re-christianize the already Christian and Apostolic Church of St. Thomas did not have an apostolic tradition comparable with that of the St. Thomas Christians. Fr. Placid Podipara has beautifully expressed it in an article where he says, "Not all particular Churches, nor any mission Church can claim a distinct apostolic origin and distinct continuity as the Malabar Church can"⁸. Why? Because succession of the hierarchy in a straight line from the Apostles through the sacrament of orders cannot be deemed the only criterion of apostolicity. It is true that through the laying on of hands a person stands in connection and continuity with the Church of the Apostles. But if a Church can claim direct and unbroken continuity in the heritage and tradition with all their details, then the apostolicity of that Church has to be deemed fuller and of a greater value than the other. As Kallarangatt has rightly said, "Apostolicity should not be considered as a pipeline succession of the apostolic authority only. Real and authentic apostolicity includes the transmission and preservation of the whole ecclesial tradition of an apostolic Church"⁹.

But with the reunion and ever since, the Malankara Catholic Church finds itself as a tiny part of the large Church of Rome, forced to seek permission from the local hierarchs of the Latin Church to fulfill its God-given duty to evangelization and pastoral care for its faithful living outside the boundaries of Kerala. Today the jurisdiction of the Malankara Catholic Church is confined to the boundaries of the state of Kerala, the district of Kanyakumari in the State of Tamilnadu and a few other areas of Tamilnadu and Karnataka bordering Kerala. The seriousness of this handicapped situation of the Church becomes clear from two considerations.

First of all, when in 1930, the leaders of the reunion movement were received into the Catholic communion. Mar Ivanios, the leader of the group was enjoying jurisdiction over the Malankara Christian population all over India. It was only in 1932 with the establishment of the Malankara Catholic Hierarchy with two dioceses (Trivandrum and Thiruvalla), that the jurisdiction of the hierarchy was limited to the bounds of the then Travancore-Cochin area, the present state of Kerala. From an ecclesial point of view, the establishment of the hierarchy was in effect a downgrading of the Church.

8. P. Podipara, *The Individuality of the Malabar Church*, Palai, 1970, p.14

9. J. Kallarangatt, "The ecclesiological Vision of Cariattil and Paremakkal". *The Freedom Fighters of Thomas Christians*, (ed) Vellilamthadam and J. Kurianal, op. cit. p. 44.

Secondly, the pastoral need of the Church demands a non-restricted jurisdiction of its hierarchs. India is a vast subcontinent in Asia. The present situation of the people demands free movement from place to place. Especially significant is the situation of Kerala and very specially the Christian population in it. Kerala is a highly populated area. It is impossible for all its subjects to find jobs within the state itself. More over the Keralites have a high percentage of literacy and higher education and the Christian population with its long tradition of leadership among other communities is highly educated. Therefore it is natural that they have to move to other areas in the country and outside where their services are needed and proper placement can be attained. According to the present day arrangement, the Oriental Catholics who move away from their home dioceses in Kerala have to seek spiritual services from the Latin Rite priest of the locality where they migrate, because the Orientals have no jurisdiction outside Kerala. It is not to forget some recent developments in the Syro-Malabar Church, which has been assigned a few areas outside their home dioceses. But the Malankara Catholics have no area outside Kerala. The Oriental bishops, since they have no jurisdiction outside the areas assigned to them in Kerala, are not able to send priests of their own Rite to look after the pastoral needs of the faithful living in the various other places in the country. About the sad predicament of the Oriental Churches and the unjust nature of the restrictions placed on them, Mar Gregorios the then archbishop of Trivandrum had strongly argued in the council of Vatican II¹⁰. But his attempts did not produce the desired fruit. Even to this day in more or less the same measure the handicapped situation of the Oriental Churches continues in India¹¹.

If we evaluate the situation in an ecclesial perspective it amounts to this that Rome accepts the Apostolic Church of St. Thomas not as a Church, but as a few dioceses within clearly marked boundaries. The above section of this article on the historical evolution of the Malankara Church has made it clear that the love of the liturgy and the ecclesial sensitivity were the main reasons for the Thomas Christians to revolt against the St. Paul Fathers.

The second Vatican Council has clearly stated that all the individual Churches have equal status and that no Church should be victimized on

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10. Cf. Mar Gregorios, "Unjust Territorial Restrictions" *Ecumenism in Danger* (ed) G. Chediath and T. Vellilamthadam, Kottayam, 1986, pp 77-79
 11. The Pope himself has voiced concern about the unjust situation of the Orientals in India in his letter to the bishops of India. Cf. "To My Venerable Brothers the Bishops of India" sent on 28 May, 1987.

the basis of its population of other non-ecclesial factors. The different individual Churches "are consequently of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reasons of rite"¹². But the fact is that in actual practice, the Orientals are considered second to the Latin Church. We are prompted to repeat the question Mar Gregorios asked in the extraordinary synod of bishops in 1985, "If all are equal, how can some (especially the Latin Rite) be more equal?"¹³

This situation has another lamentable aspect. The non-Catholic Oriental Churches which trace their origin from St. Thomas like the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Jacobite Syrian Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church etc. function with absolute freedom fulfilling their pastoral and evangelical duties. These Churches can establish parishes anywhere in India and outside and look after their faithful in these areas and spread the message of the gospel among the non-Christians. But the Malankara Catholic Church needs permission from the local hierarchs of the Latin Rite and sometimes it is summarily denied. This situation creates the impression that the Malankara Catholic Church is totally ignored in spite of the enthusiasm it showed in embracing Catholicism. This situation is not only preclusive to the Malankara Catholics; it also creates a situation in which this Church is jeered at by its non-Catholic sister Churches. The earlier a solution is found to this vexing problem, the better it would be for the Catholic Church in general and for the Malankara Catholics in particular.

Another aspect of the situation is that it is a clear hindrance to ecumenism and to the unity of the Churches. In the decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, the Church has expressed its vision of ecumenism and its goal. Ecumenism is not meant as a means to destroy the genuine cultural differences of the people. The Church does not believe that one culture is superior to another from a purely cultural point of view; rather all cultures are equal and complementary to one another. The ultimate goal of ecumenism is that "little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning."¹⁴

12. *Orientalium, Ecclesiarum*, no 3 as given in *The Documents of Vatican II*, op. cit. p. 374.

13. Mar Gregorios, "Twenty Years After" *Ecumenism in Danger*, (ed) G. Chediath and T. Vellilamthadam, op. cit. p. 81.

14. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 3. as given in W.M. Abbott (ed) op. cit. P. 348.

2. Problems within

As there is a long-standing and unsolved problem of not being able freely to care for the faithful and to share the gospel with others, the Malankara Catholic Church faces problems from within also. These are problems which question the very *raison d'être* of the Church though many people do not seem to be aware of them.

i. An Ancient Liturgy and Spiritual Bankruptcy

The Malankara Catholic Liturgy is an ancient liturgy properly evolved from a sound theological vision. For those who are able to go into the depth of the God-experience which gave form to this liturgy, it is a mine of spiritual treasures. But for the vast majority of the people, the liturgy does not speak to them in their language. It does not share their life experiences, nor does it share the present problems they are faced with. It is a fact that the West Syrian Church which is the depository of this liturgy has a long history of decline and retrogression, which resulted from its alienation from the main stream Christianity at the council of Chalcedon and after wards and from the constant struggle against the Islamic rulers of the country. All the energy was spent on self preservation and almost nothing was left for use for growth into a living organism absorbing the changes in its environment and harmoniously coping with changes. This situation has made the Church and its liturgy not only stagnant, but also dilapidated and putrefied to some extent. This liturgy seems to be unaware of what has been happening in the world at large, in the last few centuries. Therefore those who participate in this liturgy do not feel that they are in any profound way touched by it. It is true an attentive participation in a properly celebrated solemn Eucharistic liturgy gives a feeling of being transported to a heavenly world. But this feeling remains most vague and unarticulated. Therefore experience gained from liturgical participation remains in the level of feeling and never enters the realm of knowledge and conviction. Therefore the liturgy appears to be incapable of changing the life of the participants.

In recent years the Malankara Catholic Church faces a greater problem from the emergence of the Charismatic movement. There is hardly any Malankara Catholic who has not participated at least in a week-long retreat arranged by the Charismatic movement. The experience the participants receive from these retreats is entirely different from what they get from participation in the liturgy. The people who participate in both feel the discrepancy between them. People are very easily won over to the Charismatic movement with the natural result that they are slowly repelled from the official liturgy of the Church.

Even some of those who remain attached to the Church only tolerate the ancient liturgy and never love it. It is especially true of the attitude of many young men and women. They feel that the liturgy is not for them. Today there is a strong flow of the Catholic faithful to the Pentecostal groups. One of the main reasons seems to be that they receive emotional satisfaction in these ecclesial communities which they never enjoy in the Malankara Catholic liturgy.

The call of Vatican II to renew the liturgy does not seem to have touched the Malankara Church. On 29 August, 1980, the Holy Father in an address given to the Syro-Malabar and Malankara bishops reminded, in very strong words, the need for liturgical renewal. The Pope said, "The Liturgical renewal is hence the fundamental element for the ever fruitful life of your Church: a renewal founded on fidelity to your own genuine ecclesial traditions and open to the needs of your people, to your culture and to possible changes owing to your own organic process"¹⁵. But this appeal also has not produced any tangible result. In a word, the liturgy remains very much irrelevant to the actual needs of the people. This is an area which should be given maximum importance.

ii. Inculturation

History teaches us that the very fundamental reason for the dissent and division in the St. Thomas Christian Church was that the renovations and changes which the Portuguese implemented were felt to be alien to the culture of the people and their age-old practice. The St. Thomas Christians could claim in a true sense that theirs was the Indian Church properly adapted to the culture of the land. A glance at the pre-Portuguese history of this Church clearly shows how indigenous and Indian this Church was¹⁶. But once the division occurred and the Church had to fight for its own existence against all vicissitudes, it got slowly alienated from the other communities with the result that there is very little cultural contacts with other communities of the land.

Why did it happen? Perhaps due to the division, the Church was weakened and therefore not able to react and respond properly with its surroundings. Perhaps also because of the presence of the Latin Rite Church with its strict European culture. But the fact is certain, that the

15. The address of the Pope is given in *Christian Orient*, vol.1 (1980), no. 3. p. 139.

16. Cf. X. Koodapuzha, *Bharata Sabha Charitram*, op. cit. p. 273, for the indigenous character of the St. Thomas Christians before the arrival of the Portuguese.

Church is getting alienated from the culture and customs of the land. A return and adaptation is needed. The Latin Catholic Church with its many attempts at changes and adaptations according to the need of the time and culture of the land should be an example for the Malankara Catholic Church to imitate. This is not to do exactly what the Latin Church does. There are elements in its adaptations which are not suited to the mind of the Malankara population and contrary to the customs of this people. But there are many other elements of adaptation which are acceptable to the Malankara Catholic Church. The Church has to get incarnate in the soil of India. The Syrian tradition should not keep the Church away from the land of its existence. More over the ancient Syrian Church is almost becoming a memory with constant reduction in its membership and influence in the society.

Conclusion

The Malankara Catholic Church is the answer to the fundamental questions of autonomy and communion viewed together. History has a great role in forming this Church and bringing it to its present status. It has withstood the vicissitudes of history firmly adhering to the Christian faith and St. Thomas tradition. It is also a strong witness to the supreme importance of communion of Churches. In all these aspects, this Church has left a powerful legacy. But the Church has not been growing with the world; it has not got incarnate in this soil properly. It stands as a prophet of union and communion among people, especially among the believers in one God and one Lord Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit of God. In that sense, the Church's relevance is unquestionable and its responsibility in the world very great. Yet the Church has not become an Indian Church in the full sense of the word. It has to be recognized as an individual Church with full authority, equal in status to the other individual Churches. The Church also has to get incarnated in this soil. When these requirements are met, this Church will be able to fulfill its ecclesial duty properly and be *Lumen Gentium* in the proper sense.

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